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17,550 DOSES OF PFIZER-BIONTECH VACCINES ARRIVED IN MUSCAT ON SATURDAY. ADMINISTRATION OF THE SECOND SHOT OF THE VACCINE TO THOSE WHO RECEIVED THE FIRST ONE WILL START FROM TODAY.

'Oman optimistic about return to Iran nuke deal'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is optimistic about the return of all parties to Iran nuclear deal - Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - and is prepared to facilitate regional discussions with Tehran. The sultanate is also content with the level of its current relations and dialogue with Israel, according to H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

In an online conversation organised by Atlantic Council, a nonpartisan US-based think tank, on Thursday evening, H E Sayyid Badr spoke on a host of issues.

Talking about Iran and JCPOA, he said, "In 2015, Oman welcomed the establishment of the JCPOA. Today, I am optimistic that all parties may return to this framework."

"Oman has supported the inclusion of Iran in dialogue on key issues of common regional concerns, and the JCPOA provides a vital first step," H E Sayyid Badr said.

He added that the channels were directly open between the foreign policy teams in Tehran and Washington. "There is the availability of direct contact, should both countries choose to take that route."

Oman's role in peace building

"Our role is simple, really. Our approach is to listen to everyone.



As regards Israel, we are content so far with the level of our current relations and dialogue, which involve appropriate channels of communication

H E SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDI

We believe that by maintaining open channels of communication, we can build common understanding."

With regards to relations with Palestine and Israel, the Foreign Minister added that Oman remains fully committed to peace and to the concept of peace, based on a two state solution.

"This is a matter of respecting justice and international law. Achieving this two state solution

would be the single greatest contribution to regional stability we could presently imagine.

"As regards Israel, we are content so far with the level of our current relations and dialogue, which involve appropriate channels of communication, while at the same time we continue to engage with the Palestinians and support efforts for a resumption of direct negotiations sponsored by the US ad-

ministration.

"The common goal is to reach a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace."

Peace building is easier said than done

"The most important tool in resolving conflict is dialogue. Dialogue builds confidence and trust," H E Sayyid Badr said, adding, "For this reason, Omani foreign policy has always sought to maintain and encourage the widest possible dialogue. We also believe in seeking to form partnerships based on mutual understanding, rather than alliances that form opposing sides.

"By maintaining open channels of communication we can build understanding, we can compromise, we can accommodate. There is a commitment on our part and a capacity for listening, for facilitating, should others find our approach helpful."

This is why Oman has chosen not to participate in boycotts or blockades.

"It explains our decision many decades ago to support Egypt's sovereign decision to make peace with Israel, and it lies behind our reluctance to think about regional tensions in terms of divisive distinctions such as Sunni versus Shia.

"It is also important to support and strengthen institutions that can assist in peace building and in enhancing stability."

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IMF lauds Oman's swift action to contain COVID-19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An International Monetary Fund's (IMF) virtual mission to Oman - conducted from January 17 to January 31 to review economic developments, the outlook and policies - has commended the sultanate's swift response to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections in the country.

The mission also lauded the substantial fiscal measures that Oman has implemented to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

The discussions between the IMF team and the authorities here focused on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and related oil price shock, and policy priorities during the recovery phase and beyond.

Economic developments and outlook

'The authorities of Oman responded rapidly in 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections. The swift and well-coordinated response effectively limited the spread of the coronavirus in the latter part of 2020, but the social distancing and other restrictions weighed heavily on economic activity, particularly those requiring close human contact,' the mission said in a concluding statement of the Article IV Consultation of Oman, held annually.

In addition to the direct impact of COVID-19 on economic activity, sharp declines in oil prices triggered by the global spread of the pandemic, and cuts in oil production under the OPEC+ agreement, weighed on the oil sector.

The IMF statement added that fiscal measures to support the economy included interest-free emergency loans, waiving or reducing selected taxes and fees, flexibility to pay taxes in installments, and establishing the Job Security Fund to support citizens who lost their jobs.

In addition, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) eased financial conditions through lower interest rates and liquidity injections, deferred loan installment payments, and relaxed macro prudential requirements on capital buffers and liquidity ratios.

'Nevertheless, the shocks took a heavy toll on the economy in 2020. Overall GDP contracted by 6.4 per cent (revised up from the previous IMF forecast of -10 per cent)', the IMF mission observed.

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Prototype developed to detect COVID-19 infections via drones

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Researchers in Oman have developed a fully functional prototype that can detect COVID-19 symptoms in people from a distance of 10 to 15 metres with the aid of drones and artificial intelligence.

The research has been funded within the COVID-19 Research Programme, one of the programmes of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Conducted by a team led by Dr Ahmed al Maashri from Sultan Qaboos University, the prototype can gauge the symptoms by using thermography to accurately calculate the skin temperature of targets using thermal cameras, said a statement.

In addition, machine vision algorithms are used to perform tasks, such as action recognition to detect other symptoms, such as coughing and sneezing. Furthermore, machine vision algorithms will help in detecting the faces of suspected cases.



Dr Ahmed al Maashri

'This project aims to develop a drone-based system that can detect suspected cases of COVID-19 infections from a distance, using drones and the artificial intelligence (AI) technology,' the statement added. The system was tested in outdoor environments at various altitudes, multiple angles of incidence, different times of the day, and in several locations.

'The ability to detect suspected cases of infection from a distance has several advantages. First of all, this approach is safer since suspected areas can be scanned without the need to send healthcare staff to the loca-

tion. Secondly, it is much faster to scan areas using a drone instead of making door-to-door visits to these locations. Thirdly, the proposed system is much more cost-effective, especially when compared with dispatching skilled cadre who could have otherwise been utilised to provide health care to those in need,' the press statement said.

The system provides accurate skin temperatures of multiple individuals simultaneously. The low error margin was achieved by developing an automatic self-calibration mechanism for the thermal information captured by the thermal camera. 'This relieves the operator from the laborious and mundane effort of calibrating the IR thermal camera,' the statement added. Also, the system can reliably detect the faces of targets, even when they are wearing masks.

The research team also includes Prof Hadj Bourdoucen and Dr Ashraf Saleem from the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the Faculty of Engineering at SQU.

SAYYID THEYAZIN VISITS OMAN SAIL



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, visited the Oman Sail headquarters on Thursday. During his visit, H H Sayyid Theyazin met the national team sailors, sportspersons with special needs and interacted with Oman Sail officials (Supplied photo)

Oman Air plans to downsize, enhance efficiency

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Air's ambitious growth target of flying to 60 destinations and having 70 aircraft by 2022 has been dented by the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the airline industry.

The national carrier is now looking to cut costs and consolidate with fewer aircraft, focusing on being a smaller but efficient airline.

Dr Mohammed al Barwani, chairman of the Board of Directors, Oman Air, in an interview with a local news portal WAF News, said that the airline's



strategy forward will be getting in to more code sharing agreements.

"Our plan is to reduce the number of aircraft to 36 and focus on a smaller company.

Going for 70 aircraft, the risk would have been quite high for the country and the airline. Our strategy now is more code sharing," he told the news portal.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), global air passenger traffic plunged by an unprecedented 66 per cent in 2020 owing to travel restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given that travel restrictions have been applied mostly to international travel, domestic passenger traffic fared better, falling by 49 per cent, compared with 76 per cent for foreign passenger traffic, it said.

"Last year was a catastrophe. There is no other way to describe it," an IATA statement quoted director general Alexandre de Juniac as saying.



Omani ports report positive performance despite virus



Valentine's Day: Mutual respect nurtures love

Hotel booking for isolation mandatory before arrival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the need to isolate all travellers coming through air, land and sea borders, all arrivals will have to stay in hotels for at least seven days as part of institutional quarantine, the Ministry of Social Development has announced.

In a statement directed to all airlines operating in the sultanate, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) announced that they should commit to ensuring that there is a pre-confirmed hotel reservation for all arrivals on their flights covering the mandatory quarantine period of at least seven nights.

A statement issued by CAA said, 'Based on the decision of the Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19 issued in its meeting on February 10, and based on coordination with the medical response and public health sector and the relief and shelter sector, the Civil Aviation Authority informs all airlines operating into the sultanate of the following: Impose a mandatory institutional health isolation for all arrivals to the sultanate through airports at their own expense for all flights arriving in Oman starting from Monday, February 15, at 12pm.'

Passengers arriving in Oman can book accommodation at any



The relief and shelter sector has coordinated with a group of hotels to provide a place for institutional quarantine in various wilayats. Muscat governorate has six such hotels

HAMOUD AL MUNDHIRI

stitutional quarantine in various wilayats," said Hamoud bin Mohammed al Mundhiri, official spokesman for the relief and shelter sector.

The authority has identified six hotels in Muscat governorate - Swiss-Belinn Muscat, Ibis Hotel, The Secure Inn, Sheraton Oman Hotel, Tulip Inn and Somerset Panorama Muscat; In North Batinah Green Oasis Hotel and Mercure Sohar; in Musandam Dibba Beach Hotel, Khasab Hotel, Diwan al Amir and Dibba Sea View; in Dhofar Alpha Hotel Salalah; in Buraimi Arena Hotel; in Dakhliyah Al Diyar Hotel; in North Sharqiyah Golden Rays Hotel; and in South Sharqiyah Sur Beach Hotel.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* Mundhiri said, "We have registered recently about 181 people in four institutional quarantine centres in the wilayat of Buraimi in Buraimi governorate, in Sohar in North Batinah, and in Dhofar governorate. The Ministry of Social Development established the centres according to directives of the Supreme Committee to help citizens stranded in neighbouring countries, such as Yemen and the UAE."

He added, "In an institutional quarantine centre, we provide them with all services such as healthcare, food, laundry, means of communication and other services."

hotel in Oman, or take advantage of the list of hotels prepared and updated by the competent authorities for institutional isolation and published via the platform of OmanVsCovid19, it stated.

"The relief and shelter sector has coordinated with a group of hotels to provide a place for in-



Love is in the air

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Love is in the air and even COVID-19 can't stop love birds from celebrating their affection for each other in many different ways on February 14 - Valentine's Day!

As the hotels, restaurants, and cafés deck themselves up in red and create enchanting ambiances with roses and hearts, couples are looking forward to celebrate the day, though in keeping with current restrictions. Wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing are some of the many precautionary measures emphasised by hotels to ensure safe revelry among patrons on the day.

There are many others who have organised their own celebrations among family and friends in their private creative space. Fully aware of the precautions needed, in view of the pandemic, people have cut down the size of their parties to the bare minimum, and have also made arrangements for sanitising guests and maintaining hygiene.

Said al Balushi, a businessman from Amerat, said, "Every year, I do celebrate this day with my wife with a romantic walk on the beach followed by a good dinner in a five-star hotel. However, this year, we have decided not to venture out and will celebrate the day in our villa. My wife has made many creative arrangements and so have I. We must remember this is a day to celebrate love and life. So, we must be responsible and take every measure to safeguard ourselves as well as our fellow beings."

Like Balushi, there are many who prefer to stay indoors and try out creative things, mainly in decoration and preparing meals. Omar Musalmay, who got married re-

cently, said, "This is our first Valentine's Day together and I want to take my wife for a nice, romantic, candle-lit dinner with roses all around. I never ever celebrated this day before, but this time, I shall make it memorable. There are now a few new rules that we all have to follow. But, I'll try to make the most of the day."

Nikhil Verma, who works as a sales executive in a private firm, said for him Valentine's Day meant going out for a long drive. He said, "Every year, I go for a long drive with my wife and have a good dinner and enjoy the evening till late night. This year, too, we shall do the same. May be, we will drive on the Yiti road - that would be a nice outing. We don't have too many plans, but this day is a good excuse for us to enjoy and relax in each other's company."

Fahad al Rashdi, a reinsurance specialist at Oman United Insurance Company, said, "I do believe that celebrating happy occasions together, as well as difficult times helps in enhancing relationships. More than celebrating Valentine's Day, spouses need to listen to each other and inculcate an understanding that has no room for boredom. Sharing the day's events and taking all decisions together, no matter how big or small, is what enhances confidence between spouses. This is a day to remind oneself of all these acts that foster love."

Most of the hotels in the city are offering dinner and staycation packages with special offers for couples to dine in style or have an overnight stay, also indulge in luxurious wellness treatments. While bookings are picking up, the last-minute romantics are also expected to throng some of the happening places in town where outdoor seating by the sea is in good demand.

EA suspends camping in Daymaniyat Islands

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has suspended issuing permits for camping in the Daymaniyat Islands to stem the spread of coronavirus.

In a statement, the Environment Authority, said, 'The authority has decided to stop issuing permits for camping in the Daymaniyat Islands from February 11 for a period of two weeks.'

The decision came in accordance with the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee in charge of examining the mechanism for dealing with developments resulting from the spread of the coronavirus, including the closure of beaches and parks, starting from February 11.

OMQ Awards to boost Omani film industry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To spread the culture of filmmaking in the society and to promote the advancement of the industry, OMQ Company with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, launched OMQ Film Awards. The first edition of the award was held recently.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Khalid al Abri, owner of OMQ Company, said, "The OMQ Film Awards was launched in memory of three photographers, Mohammed al Nahdi, Ahmed al Abadi and Oman al Adawi who died young in an accident. The award aims to support Omani youth and spread the culture of filmmaking and prepares local films to compete in regional and international levels."

The first award ceremony was held in December 2020 which



saw 42 Omani films taking part.

"The award attracted a large group of Omani artistes who highlighted cultural, intellectual, social and heritage diversity of authentic customs and traditions. The films varied from documentary, advertising and cinematic presentations."

He added, "The best eight

films were awarded in a ceremony held under the patronage of H E Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said bin Ibrahim al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam. RO15,000 was given to the winning films."

The company screened 27 of the participating films in the competition at Novo Cinemas in

the Mall of Muscat on February 8 and 9.

"We have shown these films in cinemas to attract greater audience and appreciation," said Abri.

Talking about the future, he said, "During the second edition of the award we are planning to support Omani filmmakers."

'Oman optimistic about return to Iran nuke deal'

Continued from Page 01

"For the Sultanate of Oman this means respecting international law and participating actively in both international organisations and regional ones, such as the GCC, and the United Nations," he said.

Oman-US relations

"Oman welcomes the concrete signs that, as President Biden said last week, America is back, and diplomacy is back. Back in the Paris agreement, and ready to bring new urgency to international efforts to combat climate change. Back funding the WHO. Back in the fight against COVID, participating in the WHO vaccine consortium that seeks to ensure the poorest countries get the vaccine."

He said that America is back as a force for peace, as three decisions designed to bring about an end to the armed conflict in Yemen clearly demonstrate.

"By helping stem the flow of weapons into the conflict, by removing the exclusionary designation of Ansar Allah as a terrorist organisation, and by appointing Tim Lenderking as Special Envoy, President Biden and his foreign policy team have given us genuine hope that the end to the conflict in Yemen may be in sight."

"Oman considers itself a reliable partner of the United States in its efforts to encourage a peaceful settlement in Yemen, and, of course, in any other initiatives designed to promote peace and stability in the Middle East," he concluded.

IMF lauds Oman's swift action to contain COVID-19

Continued from Page 01

'Construction, hospitality, and wholesale and retail trade sectors were particularly hard-hit. Employment conditions due to the economic slowdown were mostly relieved by a 15.7 per cent reduction in expatriates and the flexibility to negotiate temporary wage cuts.'

To address rising fiscal vulnerabilities, the mission acknowledged, the authorities announced an ambitious medium-term fiscal adjustment plan and broad public-sector reforms.

The fiscal adjustment plan (Tawazun) targets the elimination of the fiscal deficit over 2021-25 by boosting non-oil revenues while keeping nominal fiscal expenditures broadly constant.

'A modest recovery is antici-



pated for 2021, with further strengthening of growth over the medium term, but there is substantial uncertainty around the outlook. While the roll-out of vaccination and the easing of social distancing restrictions would support increased activity globally as well as in Oman, substantial medium-term fiscal con-

solidation would weigh on growth.'

'Steady implementation of fiscal adjustment plans would strengthen fiscal and external balances substantially over the medium term.'

Policy considerations

'Combating the pandemic and

mitigating its effects should remain a priority until the recovery is firmly underway. Short term policies should continue to address the health crisis, including vaccine rollout, support the recovery, minimize long lasting economic scarring, and mitigate risks to financial stability,' the IMF statement said.

The mission added that premature and overly rapid re-trenchment could hurt early recovery and pose even larger costs on the economy.

'In this regard, withdrawal of the various types of fiscal, monetary, and financial sector support measures should be carefully coordinated and calibrated to continue to support hard-hit but viable sectors, while gradually reducing support for those that no longer need it.'

'The Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan is welcome, and its

successful implementation is key to reinforcing fiscal sustainability and alleviating financing pressures', the IMF team stated, noting that the key revenue measures under this plan 'include: (i) introducing VAT in 2021; (ii) a personal income tax on high-income earners being developed; and (iii) full-year impact of the expansion of the excise tax base in 2020. Key expenditure measures include (i) containing the wage bill via civil service reforms; (ii) targeting energy subsidies to the most vulnerable groups; (iii) streamlining capital expenditure; and (iv) broad-based improvements in expenditure efficiency'.

'These policies would also help mitigate structural weaknesses in public finances, notably heavy reliance on hydrocarbon revenue and rigidities in expenditure,' the IMF mission added.

Public Prosecution urges people to respect COVID-19 regulations



H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi (centre) during the GCC health ministers extraordinary virtual meeting (Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the number of new cases rising again, Public Prosecution has urged people to adhere to the decisions of the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19 pandemic.

The Supreme Committee closed all commercial activities in North Sharqiyah governorate between 7pm and 6am for a period of 14 days starting from Friday evening.

It also closed beaches and public parks in all governorates for two weeks beginning on Thursday.

The Supreme Committee stressed on stopping gatherings

of all kinds in rest houses, farms, camps and other places. It further recommended avoiding gatherings of families in homes and other private places.

'The Public Prosecution calls

H E Dr Sa'eedi suggested the establishment of a joint technical and structural mechanism among the GCC countries to accelerate procedures regarding vaccines and vaccination certificates

on citizens and residents to fully adhere to the decisions of the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19, and to fully adhere to the precautionary measures es-

tablished in order to preserve public health and avoid legal accountability,' Public Prosecution said.

Last week, COVID-19 cases showed an upward trend with

at 1,539.

In GCC health ministers extraordinary virtual meeting on Thursday, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, emphasised that the sultanate is extremely cautious, pointing out to the precautionary measures and recent decisions made by the Supreme Committee.

He suggested the establishment of a joint technical and structural mechanism among the GCC countries to accelerate procedures regarding vaccines and vaccination certificates, while affirming that the supplying data and information on vaccines remains a challenge after being certified by the country of origin.

Last week, the Supreme Committee said it is concerned about the rise in number of COVID-19 patients at intensive care units (ICU) in the country and decided to continue to close all land borders of the sultanate until further notice except for the passage of trucks.

The committee also decided to impose compulsory institutional health isolation for all arrivals whether through land, sea or airports, the cost of which will be borne by the individual.

'This is due to the lack of commitment of many to the home health isolation and violation of procedures that have been approved,' the Supreme Committee said.

MoL announces support for firms to implement Omanisation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Thursday announced a scheme for the private sector companies to avail government support for implementation of decisions for Omanisation through training.

In a statement, MoL said the private sector firms - willing to train Omani jobseekers through training streams provided by the ministry during the period from February 11 to May 5 - must submit applications as soon as possible, affirming that as the support to be extended is limited, priority would be given to those applications submitted first.

'The available training streams that will benefit from the government support are on the job training, training for employment, hybrid training, Khibrat programme's graduates and other training streams based on sector needs.' The MoL training will involve all accounting professions in selling new and used vehicles in car agencies, financial



and administrative professions in insurance companies and the others operating in insurance brokerage activities, the activity of selling spare parts for new vehicles affiliated with car agencies and the professions of accounting in money exchanges, administration and arranging goods in the shops operating in malls.

This is in addition to training on account auditing for car agencies, all marketing professions involving in selling new and used vehicles, professions related to business of optics and the sale of glasses and specialists in occupational and health safety for organisations that employ 50 or more workers.

Four citizens arrested for murder in Muscat: ROP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced the arrest of four citizens in connection with a murder case in Muscat governorate.

The ROP said in a statement that Muscat Governorate Police Command arrested four citizens on charges of assaulting a person that led to his death.

'Legal procedures against them are underway,' the ROP said.

Oman and FAO sign pact to boost apiculture industry



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has signed an agreement with the office of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Oman to promote and develop the apiculture industry in the sultanate.

The agreement will be implemented in coordination with the Small and Medium Enterprises

Development Authority - Riyada - and funded by the Omani Indian Fertiliser Company.

Omani honey products are rapidly developing into a profitable business for thousands of apiarists actively involved in the industry. The ministry has organised honey markets since 2014; sales jumped by 15.7 per cent from 2018 to 2019.

By organising honey markets, the ministry has enhanced bee breeders' skills, raised public

awareness on the quality of honey products, and encouraged youths to engage in the industry.

'The number of beekeepers in the sultanate reached 5,336 with 112,068 honeycombs that produced 672,208kg of honey in 2018. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will continue to organise these markets to support jobseekers and beekeepers to sell their products,' a ministry statement said.



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Industrial excellence award winners promise continuation of efforts to strengthen GDP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A number of CEOs and decision makers of companies who won His Majesty's Award for Industrial Excellence 2020 emphasised on the continuation of their efforts to increase their companies' productivity, in order to strengthen the sultanate's GDP, to enhance the quality of Omani products, raise Omanisation levels, support social responsibility activities, and look for alternatives and solutions to develop Omani industries.

They expressed that the award will contribute to improve the performance of the industrial companies and factories and stimulate the sustainability of Omani industries.

They also stressed that the implemented improvements for the completion process for the award had reflected the vision of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, which aims at creating a competitive business environment that can contribute effectively to the performance of the national economy.

Commenting on receiving the award, Eng Said bin Mohammad al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, stated, "A number of factors contributed to the company winning the first place in HM's Award for Industrial Excellence, including the adopting of the best international standards and practices in the production processes,



Dr Waleed bin Khalid al Zadjali

strengthening the production sustainability, continuous endeavour towards maintaining the quality improvement, giving attention to the environmental, health and safety concerns, improving the human competencies, enhancing customer satisfaction, supporting innovation, maintaining financial performance, and enhancing shareholder value and community service."

He added that all the affiliates of Sohar Aluminium are proud of the company winning the award, as it bears the name of His Majesty the Sultan, as well as it is considered as an appreciation of the efforts of the company's employees and their contributions to its achievements and successes.

"This award also motivates us to exert more efforts to continuously improve, sustaining the company's operations, expanding production, enhancing the company's contribution to the diversification of the national economy, and playing an effective role in achieving the goals of



Saud bin Suleiman al Riyami

Oman Vision2040," Eng Masoudi added.

The CEO of Sohar Aluminium emphasised that the support and facilitation provided by the government to the Omani industry, in terms of developing the infrastructure, governance, creating a competitive business environment, promoting Omani industrial products, creating an effective partnership between the public and private sectors, and supporting the small and medium industrial enterprises, have resulted in enhancing its competitive capabilities and strengthening the confidence of the local and foreign investors in the sultanate's investment environment.

"These incentives lead us to optimism that the Omani industrial sector will witness an increasing growth in the upcoming years, while it will be reinforced by the pillar of 'achieving wealth through a diversified economy and empowering the private sector' as for the Oman Vision 2040," Eng Masoudi added.



Eng Musallam al Jabri

These incentives lead us to optimism that the Omani industrial sector will witness an increasing growth in the coming years

ENG SAID AL MASOUDI

Eng Musallam bin Mubarak al Jabri, deputy CEO of Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel Company, praised the company's winning of the second place in overall category of HM's Award for Industrial Excellence 2020.

He stated that a number of factors played an important role in the company's wining, including the company's commitment to the quality, preservation of the environment, the involvement of national cadres in the production process, and the company's full commitment toward its customers and its business partners. He added that the innovative



Eng Musallam al Jabri

management system of the group of the company had a prominent role in the success march of the company, through the continuous implementation of comprehensive evaluation procedures for the company's operations, as well as through involving many international specialised organisations such as consulting offices to evaluate the company's operations.

Mohammad bin Harith al Barashdi, CEO of Oman Fiber Optic Company, which won the third place, said, "We are proud of this win, which means a lot to us, as it contributes to enhancing the company efforts for further development in the upcoming years."

Barashdi emphasised that winning the award came as a result of the team work of the company's employees in improving the work environment in the company in all its details, considering winning the award as motivation for further development and growth of the company, which contributes to the devel-



Mohammad bin Harith al Barashdi

opment of the telecommunications sector locally and regionally. The company has implemented a strategic business plan 2019-2023, where it uses the maximum available capabilities of the company's new factories and focusing on the innovation to provide high-quality products with high completion capabilities.

"Oman Fiber Optic Company is managed by qualified Omani cadres in various administrative levels, while the total Omanisation percentage reaching 60 per cent in all the company divisions, and 58 per cent in the fibre optic cable factory."

Dr Waleed bin Khalid al Zadjali, chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Pharmaceutical Industries Company, praised the role of the company's board of directors and the employees.

He said, "Winning the fourth place of HM's Award for Industrial Excellence will motivate the company's employees to continue their efforts to meet the

needs of the community in terms of healthcare in a scientific method, while the company gains a wide reputation in the domestic and foreign markets."

Dr Zadjali stated that the National Pharmaceutical Industries Company is planning to enter the European and United States markets during the next stage in cooperation with major companies in the pharmaceutical industries, and it is also planning to get involved in the field of manufacturing vaccines for various types of diseases.

The company, with production capacity of 1.3bn tablets annually, 32mn packages of syrups annually, 70mn packed bags of powder annually and of 263mn capsules annually, which is exporting 70 per cent of its production, has also achieved 36.9 per cent of Omanisation. It has appointed more than 50 Omani employees who hold bachelor's and diplomas of pharmacy and chemical engineering, confirmed Dr Zadjali.

Saud bin Suleiman al Riyami, chairman of National Aluminium Products Company (Napco), the company which won the fifth place in the award, assured that the wining of this award will enhance the quality of the company's products and its completion capabilities, while it is expanding the distribution of its products reaching America, Australia and Europe, where it has a great ambition to open new markets for its products.

صناعة قرطاسية الكمبيوتر (ش.م.ع.ع.)
Computer Stationery Industry S.A.O.G.

HM's Cup 2006

ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

The Board of Directors of Computer Stationery Industries SAOG ("Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the company's annual ordinary general meeting to be held at 3:00 pm on Tuesday, 02/03/2021, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings, which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 3:00 pm on Monday 08/03/2021 to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' report for the financial year ended December 31, 2020.
2. To consider and approve the corporate governance report for the financial year ended December 31, 2020.
3. To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2020.
4. To approve sitting fees to the Board of Directors meetings and it's Sub-committees for the last financial year and determine the fees for the forthcoming financial year (as per Annexure 1).
5. To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on December 31, 2020. (as per Annexure 2)
6. To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of OR 1500 to fulfill the company's social responsibilities for the year ending on December 31, 2021 (as per Annexure 3)
7. To elect a new board of directors for the company form among the shareholders and non-shareholders, anyone who wishes to be nominated for a membership in the Board of Directors must fill in the nomination form which can be obtained from the company, and submit the form after filling it to the company at least Five (5) working days before the meeting of date, (no later than the end of the business day of Monday 22/02/2021) the company will not accept any application form after that.
8. The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2021, and determine their fee.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- A. A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- B. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact Mr.Mohammed Al Nabhani on 94308245

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor

Oman Post Asyad Express to open at Sohar Port

Muscat - As part of building e-commerce capabilities, Oman Post Asyad Express, a member of Asyad Group, has signed a service level agreement (SLA) with Sohar Port and Freezone, to open the company's first service centre for postal and e-commerce services.

The launch of the new centre came in line with Oman Post

Asyad Express' strategy to offer a comprehensive logistics network locally and regionally.

The SLA was signed by Nasser al Sharji, acting chief executive officer of Oman Post Asyad Express, and Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and deputy CEO of Sohar Port.

Mahrizi said, "The new Oman Post Asyad Express service cen-

tre in Sohar Port and Freezone is a key facility on our list of investor-friendly services. This is an extension to our previous collaborations, as we already have more than 200 PO addresses across the development to ensure we continue to provide unique services and outstanding amenities to our growing base of businesses."

"The opening of the new cen-

tre is part of Oman Post Asyad Express' strategy to continue expanding our network ensuring our products and services are available to our customers across the sultanate. Our suite of postal and logistics services is delivered with focus on quality, convenience, and the know-how locally and internationally," Sharji said.

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- ACLS, BLS certified, ITLS (International trauma life support) or equivalent critical life support training. Posses SIP
- **License:** valid MO H license / passed Prometric with 60% and completed dataflow.
- PDO familiarization will have added advantages and Excellent communication in English
- Able to work in Remote/Desert Area
- Ability to provide training in first aid and basic CPR to personnel at the worksite.
- Attractive salary with great leave benefits

Please send the CV to the enclosed Email ID:
msunnyreddy@gmail.com

REGIONAL WEATHER		
	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	26	15
Doha	27	16
Kuwait City	28	16
Manama	24	16
Riyadh	28	12

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	5.24am
Sunrise	6.40am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.41pm
Maghrib	6.07pm
Isha	7.18pm

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C.R. No.: 1365452

Omani ports report positive performance despite virus

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global trade and economy, Oman's strategically located and well-equipped ports, offering end-to-end comprehensive logistics solutions, have witnessed a surge in their operational and commercial business.

In 2020, Omani ports handled about 54mn tonnes of general cargo, 18.4mn tonnes of liquid bulk and 5.2mn TEUs (twenty feet equivalent unit) containers—recording a 3.45 per cent and 5 per cent rise, respectively in the latter two segments compared to 2019.

Livestock direct imports saw a noteworthy increase in 2020, marking a 38.7 per cent rise versus 2019, with 2.5mn heads of cattle imported through Omani ports in 2020.

Working in close cooperation with government agencies, Asyad Group endeavoured to facilitate cross-regional trade and



secure local market requirements for commodities and goods from their country of origin, through linking Omani ports with 86 regional and global counterparts, according to a press statement.

The resilient and prompt response of Omani ports to the repercussions of the global pandemic is a testament to the effectiveness of their operations, leadership and the integrated model and collaborative efforts amongst the logistics sector in Oman.

An upward momentum in

on the local and regional markets.

As per the statistics available, more than 9000 vessels called on the Omani ports in 2020.

Asyad Group continued to put into practice the National Logistics Strategy 2040 (SOLS 2040) to reinforce Oman as a global logistics hub through increasing direct shipping lines; operating 200 cargo ship weekly trips; facilitating direct export and import of goods from their countries of origin; and boosting the government's returns on investments in seaports, free zones, shipping, and logistics companies.

In addition to the direct services made available to traders and importers to minimise their shipping costs and streamline incoming shipments to Oman, 90 per cent of goods are today cleared within an hour of arrival through Bayan customs system, and a wide range of incentives are provided by governmental entities to investors.

volume of handling and cargo operations featured the annual performance of Omani ports in 2020 at a time direct imports from global and regional destinations also saw a boost, thanks to tremendous efforts exerted by Asyad Group, which linked the sultanate's ports with 86 regional counterparts.

Omani ports recorded imports and exports of around 106,900 vehicles and machineries in 2020; 13.4 per cent lower than the previous year, due to the slowdown of the global economy and its direct impact

BPCL to buy out OQ's stake in India refinery for RO127mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

India's state-run Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has announced that it will buy out OQ's entire 36.62 per cent stake in Bharat Oman Refineries Limited (BORL) for about ₹24bn (approximately RO127mn).

Earlier in December 2020, Oman's integrated energy company OQ had said that it was in discussions with BPCL to divest its stake in BORL.

BORL owns and operates Bina Refinery, located at Bina in the state of Madhya Pradesh in India. Built as a joint venture between India's BPCL and the sultanate's Oman Oil Company (now OQ), the 6mn tonnes per year Bina Refinery was commissioned in May 2011. The capacity of the refinery was further increased to 7.8mn tonnes per year in 2018.

BPCL presently holds 63.38 per cent of equity shares in BORL while OQ owns remaining 36.62 per cent equity shares in the joint venture company.



'We would like to inform that BPCL has finalised commercial terms in connection with the purchase of 888,613,336 equity shares of BORL (constituting 36.62 per cent of the equity share capital of BORL) from OQ, for a consideration of approximately ₹23.9926bn,' BPCL said in a stock exchange filing. The company added that it is in the process of agreeing to definitive documentation with OQ.

The transaction is subject to the execution of the relevant transaction documentation and other conditions agreed upon among the parties, BPCL said in

its disclosure submitted to the Bombay Stock Exchange.

Upon completion of the transaction with OQ, BPCL will hold 100 per cent of equity share capital in Bharat Oman Refineries Limited.

As per the BPCL disclosure, the indicative time period for the completion of the acquisition of OQ's stake in BORL is March 31, 2021.

OQ earlier announced that it is currently looking to rationalise its local and international portfolio to fuel growth in its core business and achieve its set 2030 targets.

MHD-ITICS: Serving the Omani market with top global brands and best expertise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to bring the best of the world to the Omani market, the Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial & Consumer Solutions (ITICS) cluster of MHD LLC is focusing on restructuring its businesses to serve the local market by providing top global brands, along with the best technical expertise in infrastructure, building systems and industrial products segments.

Through its Infrastructure & Building Systems Division (IBS), MHD-ITICS offers a wide range of products, services and solutions that include commercial airconditioning systems, commercial and industrial kitchen and laundry products, commercial and industrial refrigeration, and a wide range of construction and building material (plasters, plastering chemicals, paints, sanitary ware, waterproofing solutions, drainage systems, surface bonding geotextiles, expansion joints, etc.). The division also offers high quality differentiated services to customers, to maintain and upgrade the systems that they install.

Virtually all the products and solutions brought by the IBS Division of MHD-ITICS represent major global brands that rank among top three in terms of market leadership, according to Partha Kundu, senior general manager and head of the Infrastructure & Building Systems Division of MHD-ITICS.

The IBS Division, Kundu said, is uniquely positioned to offer products, solutions and services for virtually all aspects of a commercial or infrastructure project. The range of products include high quality major international brands such as Daikin chillers for airconditioning all types of large buildings and industries; Baltimore cooling towers for buildings, refrigerated warehouses and process cooling in manufacturing; Hitachi air-conditioners for homes, mosques, and commercial spaces, etc.

In the commercial airconditioning segment, which is one of the group's most high profile and visible business verticals, IBS also



brings products and solutions from Hitachi, one of the top global brands in airconditioning.

Moreover, for the catering, hospitality and dining space, such as hotels, restaurants, hospitals and other commercial establishments, IBS has brought some of the world's best brands to the Omani market. It offers ovens from Rational (Germany), cooking equipment from several renowned manufacturers in Europe and the US, commercial dishwashers from Fagor and Hobart, laundry equipment from Speed Queen (US), professional cleaning equipment from Karcher, as well as a host of other products.

"We bring to Oman some of the most renowned brands in the world, coupled with the best technical expertise available in the country. This combination makes us the most dependable and trustworthy partner for our customers," Kundu told *Muscat Daily*.

He emphasised that their top priority remains to serve the Omani market and community with the best technology that is reliable and user friendly. "Our people are re-dedicating themselves to better understand the challenges customers face, and serve them to their complete satisfaction. While we bring con-

With a renewed focus on growth and strategic expansion, MHD-ITICS is aligning its business strategy with Oman's Vision 2040 which it believes will drive the sustainable growth for the sultanate

temporary world-class technological innovations to our customers, we are also internally doing a massive revamp, with major investments in upgrading equipment and introducing leading digital tools that help us deliver superior and differentiated services to the customers."

To serve the building materials market, IBS is supplying high-quality sanitaryware from Ideal Standard/Armitage Shanks (UK), chrome fittings from Delabie (France), superior quality premixed plasters, construction chemicals and paints from Com-mix, drainage products from ACO (UK), manhole covers from several leading global manufacturers such as Saint Gobain, geotextiles, expansion joints, as well as copper pipes from Crane (South Korea) and Kembla (Australia).

"It would be fair to say that many of our products and serv-

ices would be used in almost every major project in the country. Customers look to us for solutions that have the lowest cost of ownership, are completely reliable, ensure ease of use and cause minimum environmental impact. All of these are backed by top-of-the-line service that sets the standard for others," Kundu explained.

He said the solutions from IBS do not just make people comfortable and safe; they are also environmentally responsible and contribute significantly towards making them green buildings.

vision also supplies security and automation products to various government agencies and the private sector, for projects and locations requiring access restriction. The range of products include blockers, barriers, bollards, high security fencing, as well as specialised gates.

IPD is also engaged in the business of commercial and industrial lighting, both external and internal, as well as commercial weighing systems such as weighbridges and in-motion weighing systems.

According to Tushar Vaidya, deputy director and head of the Industrial Products Division of MHD-ITICS, the division represents some of the world's leading brands such as MK from Honeywell, GE, Gutor from Schneider, Panasonic, Avery, and many more such names.

Explaining the IPD Division's objective of achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction, Vaidya said, "We wish to be the partner of choice for the industry sectors that we cater to. We have always offered our customers the latest products and technologies, coupled with highly effective and efficient service, all delivered in the most customer friendly manner. We firmly believe that this strategy has made us one of the market leaders."



He added that IPD would continue targeting high growth in its core business areas and to work towards remaining the 'vendor of choice' for customers by improving offerings and bringing new products and solutions.

Vaidya was confident that the expansion plans chalked out by the Industrial Products Division of MHD-ITICS would lead to the division growing multifold in a very short period. As part of their new strategy, IPD plans to devote increased resources and expertise to bring new and innovative industrial products and solutions to the Omani market. He stated that the division is looking to add energy efficiency solutions, solar power solutions, switchgears, new security products and services, lighting products for outdoor applications, solar-powered street lighting, and road safety products to its industrial products portfolio, adding that the government's recent decision to move towards the cost reflective tariffs and focus on energy efficiency will create demand for new solar energy-based products.

In the post-pandemic era, IPD also has its sights on expanding into the manufacturing of products of relevance.

While retaining the essence of the business that MHD Group's

founder the late Mohsin Haider Darwish had close to his heart, MHD-ITICS is working towards modernising its businesses with latest technological advancements and backing them with industry leading service and advisory support.

"The late Mohsin Haider Darwish's mission was simple: To bring to Oman products and solutions that improve the life of the people in the sultanate, while offering unbeatable value in terms of reliability, durability, and ease of use. His ideas continue to guide us today as we modernise our businesses to make them contemporary," Honourable Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, chairperson of MHD-ITICS stated.

With a renewed focus on growth, diversification and strategic expansion, MHD-ITICS is aligning its business strategy with Oman's Vision 2040 which it believes will drive the sustainable growth for the sultanate.

"Oman's Vision 2040 sets out a clear plan and timeline for aggressively expanding the non-oil sectors. We see this as a great opportunity, and envisage our growth coming from new large developments like tourism projects, new industries, logistics hubs, and office projects, both public and commercial," Honourable Lujaina said.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

Financial, Services stocks drag MSM down

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) ended the week down by 1.29 per cent. The Financial index declined 2.05 per cent and Services index declined by 0.46 per cent. The Industrial index rose by 1.19 per cent week-on-week. The MSM Shariah index was lower by 0.39 per cent.

Local news

►Omantel announced the launch of 5G services for mobile devices giving mobile customers further value and speed for their money. Omantel had rolled out its 5G services for fixed Home Broadband in December 2019 and now, its mobile customers too are able through their 5G enabled mobile devices or 5G router - benefit more from the speed and efficiency this technology offers.

►Galfar Engineering & Contracting Company has been awarded a contract worth RO68mn for operations and maintenance works for various PAW's (DIAM) network and facilities. Contract period is for five years commencing from April/May 2021.

►Al Hassan Engineering was awarded a contract worth RO1.97mn from Larsen & Toubro Oman for construction works of CS pipe laying and earth work project. The project is to be completed in 11 months starting from February 2021.

►Energy Development Oman (EDO), the newly established

energy holding company, has been listed on the Third Market of the Muscat Stock Exchange, following an administrative decision by the Capital Market Authority (CMA). The wholly Omani government-owned entity's share capital of RO500,000 has been listed on the Third Market, the Authority said. EDO was instituted by a Royal Decree on December 6, 2020 as an Omani joint stock company to invest in conventional as well as renewable and alternative energy resources within and outside the sultanate. Its most significant asset is the government's 60 per cent shareholding in Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

►In Oman, a slump in electricity demand growth prompts major review of power sector policies. Saddled for the first time with excess electricity generation capacity in the face of a decline in demand growth, attributable to the protracted economic crunch as well as the pandemic, the sultanate is moving to overhaul longstanding capacity planning and procurement policies to support the growth of a more stable sector. The proposed review is in response to impacts from the downturn that have disrupted, among other things, the planned delivery of a number of market liberalisation initiatives, including the launch of a much-anticipated Spot Market. The latter initiative - a first-of-its-kind platform planned in the Middle East - will allow genera-



(Muscat Daily)

tors to compete for the opportunity to offer their surplus capacity to the grid.

►The sultanate's oil production, including condensates, stood at 347.94mn barrels until the end of December 2020, compared with 354.39mn barrels a year earlier, according to the National Centre for Statistics & Information (NCSI). Of the total output, crude oil production was down by 9.1 per cent at 278.84mn barrels, while condensate production rose by 45.2 per cent to touch 69.10mn barrels.

►The revenues of 3 to 5-star hotels in Oman decreased at the end of December 2020 to 62.9 per cent, according to NCSI, compared to the figures

of a year ago. The revenues of three-stars to five-stars hotels in the Sultanate until the end of December 2020 decreased 62.9 per cent to reach RO85.7mn compared to RO229.5mn at the end of December 2019. The total number of guests in 3 to five-star hotels at the end of December 2020 was 842,491 guests, a decrease of 52.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2019.

►Value of traded property in Oman went down by 11.4 per cent in 2020 to RO2.45bn compared to RO2.77bn in 2019. Traded value of mortgage contracts during the same period went down by 20.4 per cent to RO1.46bn compared to RO1.83bn last year. Traded

value of sale contracts rose by 1.6 per cent to RO925mn compared to RO911mn in 2019. Number of properties issued during 2020 declined by 3.2 per cent to 204.5k compared to 211.2k in 2019.

GCC markets

The Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) last week announced that it is reducing overall trading activity fees on all exchange transactions from February 14 as part of its 'ADX One' strategy to double the market capitalisation of companies listed on the exchange in the next three years. The new pricing structure will be the second time the exchange has reduced its charges in the past

two years to enhance market liquidity further. Trading commission on ADX was reduced in June 2019 as part of Abu Dhabi's Ghadan 2021 plan of lowering the cost of doing business in the Emirate. Under the new initiative, fees of all transactions that occur on ADX are to be reduced by more than 22 percent to 0.175 per cent from 0.225 per cent.

In Bahrain, the Ministry of Finance and National Economy announced its preliminary fiscal estimates for 2020, noting that despite the twin shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and lower oil prices, the kingdom has ensured strict fiscal discipline in 2020 and is committed to continuing its fiscal balance programme to achieve its medium-term targets. The ministry announced that preliminary data for 2020 showed that total public revenues amounted to BD2.139bn, a decrease of BD807mn compared to the approved budget.

The ministry also highlighted that the decline was driven by lower global oil prices, adding that oil revenues amounted to BD1.250bn, a 40 per cent decrease of BD846mn compared to the approved budget. The ministry further indicated that the total fiscal deficit amounted to BD1.624bn, an increase of BD817mn.

Global oil market

Brent Crude price has witnessed a tremendous rally in 2021 on the back of vaccine

availability and reopening of lockdown in various countries. Year-to-date price of Brent in 2021 upto 10 February has been the highest year-to-date price increase in last ten years. Prices have been supported by lower production in various countries specially in US where Shale oil producers have witnessed a significant drop.

Recommendation

Global market continued on a positive trajectory throughout the week, touching record highs amongst all sub-indices. Markets were largely supported by a slowdown in global infection rate as well as news on vaccination front.

Furthermore, news on economic stimuli and higher oil prices supported equity markets.

Regionally, markets continued to react to financial result announcements by companies for the recent year-end. Investors are looking for opportunities to enter into high-yielding companies with a better future outlook.

Oman has extended land border closure, and has imposed social distancing measures through closure of some entertainment avenues due to recent increase in infections.

Overall, we believe that global markets will remain volatile and that can trickle down to the region as well. We advise investors to invest in fundamentally strong companies.

By special arrangement with U Capital

Global oil demand to rise 6.41% in 2021: OPEC

Vienna, Austria - Global oil demand is expected to increase by 6.41 per cent to an average of 96.05mn barrels per day (bpd) in 2021, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said in its OPEC Monthly Oil Market Report.

'For 2021, positive developments were evident across major economies, specifically in the US, supporting demand for petroleum products, particularly industrial fuels,' the report said, clarifying that the majority of this positive economic impact is assumed to gain traction during the second half of the year.

However, the report underlined that this positive outlook was offset by expectations for a weaker recovery in transportation fuels in the first half of the year, as COVID-19 infection cases remain high in regions such as the US, Europe and Latin America. This has led to governments imposing new lockdown measures, or deepening existing ones, to help control the spread of the virus.

'Additionally, a slower rollout of vaccinations is assumed to further delay herd immunity targets in some countries and regions, and the appearance of new variants in many countries has only added to the uncertainties,' it added.

According to the report, based on the assumption that vaccination campaigns will help stem the spread of the COVID-19 and that the announced massive stimulus programmes will have a positive impact, a stronger growth rate is expected from transportation fuels in the second half of the year.



In January, OPEC crude oil production rose by 181,000 bpd month-over-month to average 25.5mn bpd

Demand for OPEC crude in 2021 has been revised up by 300,000 bpd from the previous month to stand at 27.5mn bpd, which is 5mn bpd higher than in 2020.

Global oil production in January rose by 430,000 bpd compared to the previous month to average 93.12mn bpd, although it reflected a year-on-year fall of 7.33mn bpd.

In January, OPEC crude oil production rose by 181,000 bpd month-over-month to average 25.5mn bpd, according to the report.

As a result, the share of OPEC

crude out of total global production rose to 27.4 per cent in January, marking a 0.1 per cent increase compared with the previous month.

Crude oil output increased mainly in Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Iran, while production decreased primarily in Libya, Nigeria and Iraq.

Before voluntarily adjusting its production lower by an additional 1mn bpd in February and March, Saudi Arabia was the country among OPEC members that raised its monthly crude oil production the most in January with an increase of 89,000 bpd to reach 9.054mn bpd.

Exempted from OPEC's production cuts, Libya's production, however, fell by 51,000 bpd to 1.164mn bpd.

Non-OPEC liquids production in January increased by 25,000 bpd compared with the previous month to average 67.62mn bpd.

Anadolu Agency

Qatar, Saudi to resume trade today

Doha, Qatar - Qatar's authorities said the country will resume commercial traffic with Saudi Arabia on February 14, adhering to the coronavirus protective measures.

The Qatari News Agency quoted the customs authority as saying, 'The General Authority of Customs has issued a number of regulatory and precautionary controls pertaining to the movement of imported and transiting goods from the Salwa border port in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Abu Samra border port in the State of Qatar.'

Truck drivers coming from the Salwa port must obtain a certificate attested by the Saudi Health Ministry, proving that they have been tested for coronavirus with a validity period of not less than 72 hours before entering the Abu Samra border crossing.

Likewise, the customs authority said drivers and trucks transporting goods to Qatar through the Abu Samra border crossing



are not permitted to enter the country and the goods will be unloaded and reloaded onto local trucks by the importer.

Earlier this month, the customs authority in Qatar said that 95 private vehicles entered Qatar from Saudi Arabia through the border crossing during the

first three days of its opening after the announcement of the Gulf reconciliation.

'The number of private vehicles that crossed the Abu Samra port from Qatar towards Saudi Arabia during the same period reached 835,' it said.

Qatar signed a reconciliation

agreement with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt to end their rift, which started in 2017.

Following their reconciliation deal, the four countries agreed to reopen their airspace to Qatari flights.

Anadolu Agency

Volkswagen and Microsoft tie-up to develop autonomous vehicles

Frankfurt, Germany - German auto giant Volkswagen (VW) and US tech leader Microsoft said that they were joining forces to develop autonomous vehicle driving systems, cementing a 2018 partnership to exploit the possibilities of the Cloud.

VW said it aims to speed up development of such connected systems, which are increasingly becoming the norm in the auto industry as it transitions to elec-

tric vehicles.

"This is the next step in our strategic partnership," Microsoft director Scott Guthrie said.

The companies gave no information about the financial or contractual details of the accord. VW and Microsoft have co-operated since 2018 on creating a Cloud platform for connected vehicles.

The first trials of the planned system are due later this year,

with rollout envisaged in 2022, a statement said.

Volkswagen plans to invest some €27bn in this field by 2025.

Volkswagen's 'Car.Software' unit set up last year will have some 11,000 people working on its 'VW.OS' operating system which will connect cars over the Cloud.

The German group, like its peers, is finding that the shift into

electric cars is as much if not more of a computing challenge than one of manufacturing, leading to an increasing number of such tie-ups.

General Motors has just signed a similar deal with Microsoft to speed up its introduction of autonomous vehicles while France's Renault established a partnership with Google last year.

AFP

Bank Muscat pockets 'Best Foreign Exchange Provider in Oman' award

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has won the Best Foreign Exchange Provider in Oman (2021) award from *Global Finance*.

The foreign exchange and international payments landscape is an essential part of banking relationships in today's global economy. Given the dynamic environment and continuous enhancement in technology, the responsibility for quicker and efficient processing is a shared effort by all financial institutions. Superior transaction processing quality resulting in higher efficiencies, faster payments, cost reductions and honouring of commitments to operational excellence have been the hallmarks of the bank's operations.

Bank Muscat is focused on offering a number of niche services to sustain its competitive edge and is the only bank in the country to offer a full suite of treasury products and services on a 24x7 basis through its Treasury & Capital Markets division. The bank is a consistent winner of the Best Foreign Exchange Provider in Oman award as well as awards by major international banks for outstanding performance in error-free remittance and fund transfers. The award criteria included transaction volume,



market share, scope of global coverage, customer service, competitive pricing and innovative technologies.

The prestigious publication Fast Markets MB has consistently ranked the bank among the top 5 global institutions for commodity price forecast.

A multi-award winning organisation, Bank Muscat has established more than 500 correspondent banking relationships across the world through its Global Financial Institutions division. Its performance across different facets of banking and fi-

nance have been consistently lauded by the international financial and banking community for several years.

The treasury products and services include meeting foreign exchange requirements of customers and offering hedging solutions for foreign currency, interest rate benchmarks and commodity price risks.

The division offers streaming foreign exchange prices to its counterparty banks and customers and is among the few regional banks to offer a comprehensive commodity

hedging product suite to its customers via precious metals, base metals, agricultural and energy products.

The bank's Treasury & Capital Markets division continues to manage the bank's surplus liquidity through active participation in money markets instruments in line with bank's overall ALM policy and regulatory guidelines.

The service encompasses East Asian as well as early New York time zones spanning all international and GCC working days.

Bank Nizwa bags title of Best Islamic Bank in Oman

Recognised as a leading Islamic bank in the sultanate, Bank Nizwa has regained the title of 'Best Islamic Bank in Oman' at the Islamic Finance News (IFN) Best Banks Poll 2020 in the category of innovation, creation and tradition. The IFN Best Banks Poll 2020 is the biggest and broadest yet survey by IFN and recognises the best Islamic finance service providers across 44 categories and 35 countries. The poll respondents consist of Islamic finance issuers, investors and government bodies.

The IFN award is a testament to Bank Nizwa's unparalleled commitment to constantly inculcate innovative strategies, capitalise on the latest technological advancements and remain at the forefront of encouraging digitalization in the banking sector.

Demonstrating utmost resilience in all its operations and exhibiting exceptional performance across all its departments even in the face of unprecedented challenges, Bank Nizwa has recorded RO11.067mn in net profit indicating a 9 per cent growth after tax for the period ended December 31, 2020, compared to RO10.17mn in 2019. The bank's total assets also grew by 17 per cent to reach RO1205.99mn compared to RO1034.58mn in the preceding year. Its growing preference amongst customers is reflected in its increasing customer deposit portfolio which increased by 16 per cent to RO924.2mn against RO797.1mn on a year-on-year basis.

The bank's financing to cus-



tomers rose by 20 percent to RO1004.1mn for the year ending December 31, 2020 compared to RO839.3mn in 2019.

"It is a moment of great pride as Bank Nizwa has once again been awarded this coveted title by IFN. The IFN Awards honor the very best in the Islamic financial industry and is highly recognized by the global Islamic capital markets," said Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa.

"Our thoughtfully curated portfolio of Sharia'a-compliant products and services, unfaltering customer-centric approach and dedication to digital transformation in all areas of business has helped us make our mark in the Islamic banking sector."

Incorporating digitalisation in different areas, Bank Nizwa has proved itself as a pioneer in the field, paving the way for digital transformation and innovation in the banking sector. While ensuring the highest level of cyber and

data security, Bank Nizwa has infused innovation in all its operations and built a digital ecosystem for the bank. This has helped in redefining the customers' journey when it comes to progressive Sharia'a-compliant solutions that meet all financial requirements of the customers.

Bank Nizwa also boasts of having a versatile mobile application that provides greater banking accessibility through a wide range of user-friendly services and is constantly updated to include additional features. All its e-banking portals offer a seamless user experience, thus encouraging everyone to move to a digital space.

Apart from winning the same title in 2018, Bank Nizwa has also been awarded other prestigious titles like the most recent award by Signature Magazine which named it the most trusted Islamic Bank.

Mazoon Dairy to take part in Gulfood Dubai for first time

Mazoon Dairy announced its participation in the Gulf Food Exhibition 'Gulfood' 2021 which will be held in Dubai World Trade Centre from February 21 to 25 in its 26th edition. This is the first abroad participation for Mazoon.

Ahmed Mohammed al Ghafri, chief support officer, said, "The participation of Mazoon in the Gulfood exhibition is the company's contribution that gives Oman a major role in food industries in the region and the world. This participation strengthens Mazoon's brand and makes it a leading brand in the sector."

Ghafri added, "This participation will open the horizons of new cooperation, experience exchanging in the food industry and emerging food technologies. Moreover, it provides the chances of expanding to Gulf and International markets."

Khalid Hamed al Mahruqi, branding manager, said, "Mazoon has gone a long way in di-



versifying its products' basket since it launched its operations in October 2019. It produces a wide variety of fresh milk with many flavours such as Luban milk, yogurt, and fresh dairy products. In addition to that, it produces long-life milk in various sizes and flavours of strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate.

"Moreover, it launched the sugar-free juices that are distinguished by their unique taste, ice cream in different sizes and flavours, and recently launched Mazoon spreadable cheese,

which is free of vegetable oils and made from fresh cow's milk."

Mahruqi added, "Mazoon Dairy distributes its products around the sultanate through distribution centres in the governorates. The company aims to expand the number of its products from 118 products currently to 250 products of various types and sizes."

The gulf food exhibition is one of the largest commercial annual exhibitions in the food and beverages sector.

Galaxy S21 Series 5G receives outstanding pre-order response

Samsung Gulf Electronics has revealed that the Galaxy S21 Series 5G pre-order phase was a huge success in Oman. Ensuring consumers can register their interest for new devices in advance of official market availability is a longstanding brand tradition, one that has yielded newfound success once again. Between January 14 and February 4, pre-orders increased by 176 per cent compared to 2020 when the previous generation was released, with the Galaxy S21 Ultra accounting for 65 percent of the total demand.

"The response from consumers in Oman during the initial rollout was even more encouraging," said Osman Albora, senior director - Mobile Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

"An increase of 176 per cent compared to the same time in 2020 shows that we are doing the right things and reaffirms



customer-centric approaches really do work in the world of tech and innovation. We are delighted with the Galaxy S21 Series 5G's reception nationwide, and we look forward to consumers mak-

ing everyday moments much more epic with their new devices over the coming period."

Comprising the Galaxy S21, Galaxy S21+, and Galaxy S21 Ultra, the all-new flagship suite

empowers fans to share their world and connect with the things and people that matter most. Boasting pro-grade camera and video capabilities, premium viewing and connectivity experiences, and a bold and iconic design, the innovative devices have been introduced to change everything.

Backed by the power of the Galaxy ecosystem, each boast Samsung Knox - the brand's proprietary chipset level (SoC) security platform for market-leading security, tamper-resistant secure memory, and a secure processor. Additionally, 33 MP photos can be extracted straight from 8K videos recorded on your Galaxy S21 Series device; as for Single Take feature, it lets you capture photos and videos simultaneously backed with AI processing.

For more details, please visit www.samsung.com

Alfa Romeo Giulia sports sedan wins 'Best Car 2021' title

Another prestigious award for the Alfa Romeo Giulia, the car magazine *auto motor und sport* having named it 'Best Car 2021'. Readers voted for the Italian sports sedan as the winner in the mid-size/import category - for the fourth time in the past five years. With a share of 22 per cent of the vote, the Alfa Romeo Giulia prevailed against 14 competitors.

The Alfa Romeo Giulietta and Alfa Romeo Stelvio, second and third in their respective categories, complete Alfa Romeo's success in the 'Best Car 2021' awards.

The Alfa Romeo Giulia's fourth victory in five years at the 'Best Cars Awards' serves as further proof of the unwavering en-



thusiasm among car fans in Germany. This is shown not only by the victory of the Giulia, but also by the top rankings of the Stelvio and Giulietta models in their respective categories.

More than 101,000 readers took part in the 45th edition of the Best Cars competition, held by the trade magazine *auto, motor und sport*. They had the choice between 387 models divided into 11 categories, including separate acknowledgments for import vehicles. The awards ceremony took place virtually for the first time.

Since its foundation in Milan, Italy, in 1910, Alfa Romeo has designed and crafted some of the most stylish and exclusive cars in its 110-year history.

That tradition lives on today as Alfa Romeo continues to take a unique and innovative approach to designing automobiles.

The Alfa Romeo Stelvio sets a new benchmark in performance, style and technology in an SUV. The award-winning Alfa Romeo Giulia delivers race-inspired performance, advanced technologies and an exhilarating driving experience to the premium mid-size sedan segment. The Giulia Quadrifoglio and the Stelvio Quadrifoglio feature Alfa Romeo's most powerful production engine ever with unsurpassed 0-60 mph times of 3.8 and 3.6 seconds, respectively.

Rounding out Alfa Romeo's world-class lineup is the hand-crafted Alfa Romeo 4C Spider.

Range Rover Sport SUV achieves 1mn sale milestone

Land Rover is celebrating the one millionth sale of the Range Rover Sport. Sold in December 2020, the occasion is being marked with a commemorative film highlighting just some of the famous landmarks this ultimate luxury performance SUV has encountered over its 15 years in production.

The Range Rover Sport made its debut in 2005, with the current second-generation making a spectacular entrance in New York City in 2013 with the assistance of actor Daniel Craig.

Its dynamic breadth of capability has been showcased across the globe, setting a new record in its launch year on the Pikes Peak Hill Climb course in the USA and then setting the fastest recorded crossing of the Empty Quarter desert in Saudi Arabia.

In 2018, the Range Rover Sport completed a world-first for a vehicle driving up the 999 steps to renowned landmark Heaven's Gate in China.

In 2020, the Range Rover Sport offering was enhanced with new Ingenium six-cylinder diesel engines with mild hybrid



technology, new special edition models, as well as the previously launched P400e PHEV powertrain, providing customers with greater choice than ever. Configure your Range Rover Sport at www.landrover-me.com.



AAOIFI, CIBAFI sign MoU for industry development

Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) and the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to roll out areas of cooperation for the development of the Islamic financial services industry.

The MoU was signed by the secretary generals of AAOIFI and CIBAFI, Omar Mustafa Ansari and Dr Abdelilah Belatik, respectively at the AAOIFI head office. This MoU is directed at strengthening collaboration and fostering joint initiatives and activities in the areas of capacity building, awareness and advocacy programmes and joint industry publications. All aimed at addressing and enhancing understanding of emerging topics

and issues in the industry.

This initiative also paves the way for a collaborative exchange of expertise and experience from both institutions. Ansari stated, "AAOIFI and CIBAFI have shared objectives of serving and developing the Islamic finance industry. AAOIFI is glad that this MoU provides a platform for strengthening the cooperation between the organisations in achieving our common goals."

Dr Belatik, said, "One of CIBAFI's strategic goal is to facilitate coordination between members and other institutions that support Islamic finance. In fulfillment therefore of this objective, we are pleased to formalise the cooperation with AAOIFI, one of our members, to share best practices and strengthen Sharia'a objective."

PSM students get admission to medical colleges

Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) is offering both Federal Board and A' Level and O' Level studies.

It is remarkable that our students are making their mark in both streams by performing marvellously in the exams as well as by getting their splendid academic achievements ahead.

This is one of the hallmarks that the following students of Pakistan School Muscat have secured their position among the top 100 students in the merit list to get admission to medical and dental colleges of Punjab, Pakistan and one student named Muhammad Ahmad Khan is also in the waiting list.

- i. Laiba Ali
 - ii. Muhammad Taaib Imran
 - iii. Ayesha Khadim Hussain
 - iv. Xeneb Sulemani
- It is also notable that one of the students named Aaala Ali has also got admission to the National University for Science and Technology College of Medicine and Health Sciences Oman which is indeed a matter of pride for students, faculty, parents, community and Pakistan school system. It is obviously the result of the hard work of students, untiring efforts of the faculty and a collaborative association of parents and the institution that has made it all possible.

Give the moon with Omega this Valentine's Day

"I'd give you the moon"
It's a promise made in countless songs and poems - and even the crazy in love know it's lunacy. Still, if you're already floating on a cloud, why not take an extra leap and give it a try?
It's a beautiful gesture and your sweetheart will love you for it.

Don't worry, you don't have to go it alone.

We've already been to the lunar surface - so we know the way.

The stage is set for adventure, so let's begin.

To help set the scene, we've provided a cluster of stars: also known as a Constellation. Two in fact!

Both in steel and 18K Sedna gold.

Also, as you're on a mission to



grab the moon, it seemed logical to include watches with 'claws'

"If giving the whole of the moon is beyond your grasp, consider the Constellation, with its

famous half-moons"

Be sure to check conditions on the lunar surface just prior to

launch.

To light the way, we suggest the golden glow of luxury, in generous supply on Omega's new Trésor in 18K Moonshine gold.

Remember the love mission motto: High style, even in low gravity.

"Should it prove impossible to give your loved-one the moon, the De Ville with its delicate mesh bracelet and 38 full-cut diamonds is the perfect plan B"

You're about ready to bring back the moon, so good luck and bon voyage.

Remember, if you'd rather reach for the possible, we have beautiful timepieces your loved one will adore just as much - and they're a lot easier to gift wrap.

Either way, we wish you a happy Valentine's Day - and moonlit night.

Gulf Downstream Association to host virtual conference 'Transform' on February 22, 23

The Gulf Downstream Association (GDA) announced its virtual conference 'Transform' planned on February 22-23.

The free-to-attend conference, 'The Evolving Future of Leadership and Project Management', will provide a unique opportunity for industry participants to discuss and share what kind of leaders will take the opportunity to forge ahead with strategic partnerships and bold investments to signal a positive 2021, whilst delivering efficient capital projects under current market conditions. Expected to take part are a range of regional and international operators, policy makers, plant owners, industry consultants, project management professionals, academics, engineers and business and service providers from across the oil and gas value chain.

Day 1 focuses on 'The New Reality of Transformational Leadership' and will demonstrate how industry experts view the necessity and traits of transformational leadership and how it is essential in empowering people, embracing digitalisation, foster-



ing accountability and encouraging innovation. Key sessions include: the Leadership experience and development journey, empowering Women in leadership roles, and Talent management & Knowledge sharing.

Day 2 goes on to explore 'The New Reality of Project Management' and how the future of capital projects should be managed in light of the new business climate. Key sessions include: What investments matter most post the COVID-19 pandemic, the journey of EPC/Engineering

firms towards digitalisation and the enhancement of project delivery through modularisation and Advanced Work Packaging (AWP).

The event has been designed by GDA's two Technical Committees (Project Management and Leadership & People Development) under the leadership of Emad A Muhaisen, division head, Jazan Economic City Development Department, Saudi Aramco, serving as the event committee's chairman, and Rayyan S Tayeb, human re-

sources professional at Domestic Refining & NGLF, Saudi Aramco, serving as the event committee's vice chairman. They are also the chairpersons of their respective Technical Committees under GDA.

Khalid Hadi, GDA's acting secretary general, commented, "We're excited to continue to facilitate joint industry discussions and action during what continues to be an unprecedented time for our industry and others following the events of the past year. The conference agenda

puts forward two key takeaways including traits required of bold leaders to steer strategically yet unconventionally and to understand how to deliver capital effective projects in current market conditions. Contributions from award-winning authors, training heads, consultants, and business leaders make this free-to-attend virtual event an absolute not-to-miss."

Muhaisen, GDA's virtual conference chair, added, "To unleash the potentials of young workforce, leverage talented and inspiring leadership and realise benefits by creating value, downstream companies will have to pivot quickly. Through our programme, we hope to enable downstream players to share knowledge and best practices related to people development and managing projects especially during the current and any similar challenging business environments."

For a full conference agenda, please visit: <https://www.gda-conference.org/transform-gda-virtual-programme-bahrain-time-zone>

Attendance is free.

Qatar Airways Cargo appoints three GSAs



Effective February 21, Qatar Airways Cargo will recommence cargo sales and bookings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Arab Republic of Egypt with the appointment of general sales agents in these countries.

The letter of appointment has been awarded to the following GSAs:

1. Globe Air Cargo, ECS Group Subsidiary - for the United Arab Emirates
2. Yusuf Bin Kanoo co Ltd - for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
3. Venus Air Cargo - for the Arab Republic of Egypt

Guillaume Halleux, Qatar Airways chief officer cargo said, "The resumption of passenger flights to these three countries is great news, allowing us to re-establish trade and support our customers. Along with the flights, we will also be offering

trucking services to and from other offline points within these countries. We are pleased to appoint these GSAs who have an excellent reputation and share the common values of customer centricity and service excellence. We are certain that they will help promote the Qatar Airways Cargo brand further and grow our footprint."

The cargo carrier operates belly-hold flights to Riyadh and Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and Alexandria and Cairo in the Arab Republic of Egypt. Qatar Airways Cargo will start accepting cargo bookings for transporting freight into and out of these three countries through its appointed general sales agents.

The world's leading air cargo carrier is perfectly positioned to support its customers.

UN demands junta to release Suu Kyi

Yangon, Myanmar - Opposition to Myanmar's new military regime intensified on Saturday as spontaneous neighbourhood watch groups mobilised to thwart arrests of anti-coup activists and the UN demanded the release of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The army takeover that brought a decade-old democracy to an end last week has unleashed a storm of anger and defiance, with huge daily protests bringing urban centres around the country to a standstill.

Since taking Suu Kyi and her top allies into custody, troops have stepped up arrests of civil servants, doctors and others joining strikes to call on the generals to relinquish power.

Crowds defied overnight curfews to mass on the streets as night fell, hours after finishing a seventh straight day of rallies, following rumours that police were launching a fresh wave of arrests.

One group swarmed a hospital in the city of Patheingyi on rumours that a popular local doctor would be taken into custody, chanting a Buddhist prayer urging protection from harm.

"If I have problems, I will ask for your help," Than Min Htut told the group who had come to aid him, flashing the three-finger salute that has come to symbolise resistance to the coup.

Than Min Htut told AFP on Saturday he was still free and



Protesters holding placards demanding release of their leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration in Naypyidaw on Saturday (AFP)

would continue participating in a civil disobedience campaign opposing military rule.

People in Yangon skirted a junta ban on Facebook to organise neighbourhood watch groups that warned of rumoured arrests.

"We didn't know who will be taken, but when we heard the sound, we went out to join our

neighbours," said Tin Zar, a storekeeper in Yangon's north.

"Even if they shoot, we are not afraid," she told AFP.

More than 320 people have been arrested since last week's coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group.

An emergency session of the

UN Human Rights Council in Geneva called for the new regime to release all 'arbitrarily detained' persons and hand power back to Suu Kyi's administration.

The UN deputy rights chief Nada al Nashif warned Myanmar in the Friday meeting that 'the world is watching' events unfold in the country.

News of more arrests did not stop tens of thousands from returning to the streets of Yangon on Saturday, where columns of traffic ground to a halt and blared their horns for five minutes to mark the birthday of Aung San.

The independence hero and father of Suu Kyi is revered locally for freeing the country from

Defiant protesters intensified opposition to coup on Saturday as spontaneous neighbourhood watch groups mobilised to thwart arrests of anti-coup activists

colonial control but was gunned down at the age of 32, just months before the end of British rule.

Protests nationwide

Nationwide protests have remained largely peaceful, though authorities have used tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to disperse some rallies.

At least two people in the capital Naypyidaw were shot by police and critically injured, including one 20 year old woman who remains in intensive care.

Officers cleared a sit-in protest in the port city of Mawlamyine on Friday with rubber bullets, injuring several demonstrators.

Nine others taken into custody were later freed after a crowd mobbed a police station and demanded their release.

State media reported on Friday counter-protests by military supporters in various parts of the country, citing crowd estimates a small fraction of the anti-coup rallies seen this week.

But a demonstration in Naung Po Aung on the same day underscored the nationwide breadth of opposition to the junta, with hundreds marching in procession through the village of only 7,500 people in one of the most remote corners of the country.

'Internal affairs'

So far, the generals remain undeterred by the widespread condemnation on the streets - and overseas. They justified seizing power with claims of widespread voter fraud in November's election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide.

Washington this week imposed targeted sanctions against top military brass.

But traditional allies of the country's armed forces, including Russia and China, have slammed the international outcry against the coup as interference in Myanmar's 'internal affairs'.

Suu Kyi has not been seen since her detention nearly two weeks ago, though NLD official Kyi Toe said on Saturday she was in Naypyidaw and still in 'good health'.
AFP

Draghi sworn in as Italy's PM as country hopes to turn page

Rome, Italy - Former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi was formally sworn in as Italy's new prime minister on Saturday, against the backdrop of the deadly coronavirus pandemic and a crippling recession.

The appointment of the 73 year old known as 'Super Mario' capped weeks of political instability for the country still in the grips of the health crisis that has killed more than 93,000 people.

"I swear to be loyal to the Republic," recited Draghi, as he stood before President Sergio Mattarella in the ornate presidential palace in a televised ceremony.

Members of his new Cabinet, who include technocrats, veteran politicians and ministers held over from the previous government, each took the oath of office. Draghi was parachuted in by Mattarella after the previous centre-left coalition under premier Giuseppe Conte collapsed, leading Italy rudderless amid the worst recession since World War II.

After assembling a broad-



President Sergio Mattarella (left) and Prime Minister Mario Draghi at the swearing-in ceremony at the presidential palace in Rome on Saturday (AFP)

based coalition, on Friday night Draghi formally accepted the post of premier, publicly revealing the new cabinet for the first time.

On Wednesday, Draghi will be presented to the Senate, the upper house of parliament, followed by the lower Chamber of Deputies on Thursday for a confidence vote that will give the final official blessing to his government.

'Break a leg,' read the headline

on *La Stampa* daily on Saturday, as an Ipsos poll in the *Corriere della Sera* daily showed 62 per cent of Italians supporting Draghi.

Conte's final months in office were marked by political turmoil but the former law professor - who rose to power in 2018 with no prior political experience - represented for many Italians a comforting, steady hand during the darkest moments of the pandemic last year.

Draghi has the support of a

rainbow coalition ranging from leftists to Matteo Salvini's far-right League.

It includes the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) and Italia Viva - who made-up the previous government before falling out over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

M5S, parliament's biggest party that began life as an anti-establishment movement, was split over whether to support a government led by an unelected technocrat.

But in an online vote, members backed Draghi by 59 per cent, after securing the promise of a new super-ministry for 'ecological transition'.

That post has gone to renowned physicist Roberto Cingolani, who works at Italian aerodynamics giant Leonardo.

The senior deputy governor of Bank of Italy, Daniele Franco, was named economy minister, while Roberto Speranza and Luigi Di Maio stay on at health and foreign affairs, respectively.

AFP



Car bomb kills 3 in Mogadishu

Mogadishu, Somalia - Three people were killed and eight wounded after a car bomb detonated near a security checkpoint in the Somali capital Mogadishu on Saturday, a security official and witnesses said.

"The policemen were chasing the hostile vehicle after spotting it a few kilometres away from where it exploded," the official, Abdurahman Mohamed, said.

"Three civilians died according to the information we have received so far and eight others are wounded," he said.

"The police opened fire on the vehicle and chased it and this allowed many people to flee. This has really limited the number of casualties the blast could have caused."

Witnesses said they heard gunfire and saw vehicles including three-wheel tuk-tuks scatter before the heavy blast occurred on a key road.

"I was at a gym close to where the blast occurred, but thanks to God we have heard the gunshots before the blast. And this alerted many people including myself

and we fled from the area to take cover before the vehicle reached the area of the explosion," said one witness, Dahir Osman.

A police statement said there had been no deaths, only seven wounded in the blast which destroyed eight cars and nine tuk-tuks. However witnesses contradicted this.

"My uncle was among the dead, I went there to collect his body and I saw another civilian who died in the blast as well," said Suleiman Ali.
AFP

200 years after Napoleon defeat, Russia and France bury their dead

Vyazma, Russia - The remains of French and Russian soldiers who died during Napoleon's catastrophic retreat from Moscow in 1812 were laid to rest on Saturday in a rare moment of unity between the two countries.

Officials and descendants of 19th-century Russian and French military leaders gathered for a windswept ceremony in the western town of Vyazma to re-bury the remains of 126 people killed in one of the bloodiest battles of Napoleon's Russian campaign.

The snow fell and a military band played in temperatures of -15°C as uniformed pall-bearers carried eight flag-draped caskets at a cemetery in Vyazma, a town more than 200km west of Moscow.

The caskets containing the remains of 120 soldiers, three women and three teenagers were later put into the snow-covered ground to the sounds of a gun salute.

The earth had frozen, and the coffins were left in the ground covered by a white canvas.

"As generations pass, death and time reconcile everyone," Yulia Khitrovo, a descendant of Russian field marshal Mikhail Kutuzov considered a national hero for repelling Napoleon, said at the ceremony.

Prince Joachim Murat, a descendant of one of Napoleon's most celebrated marshals, was also in attendance along with dozens of re-enactors in period uniforms.

The interment took place as



Re-enactors in period uniforms attend a burial ceremony of the remains of Russian and French soldiers during a burial ceremony in the western town of Vyazma in Russia on Saturday (AFP)

France marks the bicentenary of the military leader's death this year.

The remains were discovered in a mass grave by French and Russian archaeologists in 2019.

The dig was led by Pierre Malinowski, the Kremlin-connected head of the Foundation for the Development of Russian-French Historic Initiatives.

The three women are believed to be so-called 'vivandieres', who provided first aid and kept canteens in the French army, while the three adolescents are believed to have been drummers.

All are thought to have fallen during the Battle of Vyazma on November 3, 1812 at the beginning of the French army's retreat from Moscow and before the

horrific crossing of the Berezina River. The ceremony marked a rare moment of unity between Russia and Europe at a time of heightened tensions over a litany of issues including the Kremlin's increasingly harsh crackdown on the opposition.

"Direct descendants of the main players in the conflict are meeting here together in a sign of reconciliation to commemorate the Russian and French soldiers that their ancestors commanded more than 200 years ago," Malinowski told AFP ahead of the re-burial.

The site was first discovered during construction work and was initially believed to be one of the many World War II mass graves that dot western Russia.
AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Virus expected to last long-term despite global vaccine rollout

Stockholm, Sweden - The head of the EU's disease control agency warned on Friday that the novel coronavirus could last indefinitely even as global infections slowed by nearly half in the last month and vaccine roll-outs gathered pace in parts of the world.

In an interview with AFP, ECDC chief Andrea Ammon urged European countries in particular not to drop their guard against a virus that 'seems very well adapted to humans' and may require experts to tweak vaccines over time, as is the case with the seasonal flu.

"So we should be prepared that it will remain with us," said Ammon, the head of the Stockholm-based European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

After the latest harsh wave of a pandemic that started in China more than a year ago, glimmers of hope flickered as an AFP database showed the rate of new COVID-19 infections has slowed by 44.5 per cent worldwide over the past month.

More than 107mn people have been infected worldwide and nearly 2.4mn have died from COVID-19.

But disease experts warned that vaccines won't end the pandemic unless all countries receive doses in a fast and fair manner.

Writing in an open letter published in the Lancet medical journal, the authors said with vaccine stockpiling in wealthier countries, 'it could be years before the coronavirus is brought under control at a global level'.

The warning came as US vaccine maker Moderna said it was seeking clearance with regulators around the world to put 50 per cent more coronavirus vaccine into each of its vials as a way to quickly boost current supply levels.

In Britain, a marked drop in infections and accelerating vaccinations have prompted some within the governing Conservative Party to push for stay-at-home rules to be lifted in early March.

Much of the country re-entered lockdown in early January to curb a more transmissible COVID-19 variant first identified in the UK.



A 72 year old woman gets vaccinated with a dose of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine in the Nossa Senhora Livramento community on the banks of the Rio Negro near Manaus in Brazil (AFP)

Peru Health Minister resigns over ex-president jab scandal

Lima, Peru - Peru's Health Minister resigned on Friday, state TV reported, amid a growing scandal over claims that former president Martin Vizcarra was vaccinated against COVID-19 before the jab was available to the public.

Pilar Mazzetti - who had served as the country's minister of health since July last year - has presented her letter of resignation to President Francisco Sagasti, state television network TV Peru reported. The government is yet to formally confirm she is stepping down.

Her successor is due to be sworn in soon, local media said, and will be the South American nation's fifth health minister since the pandemic first emerged in the country 11 months ago.



Peruvian Health Minister Pilar Mazzetti (AFP)

They will take office as the country continues to be hampered by a second wave of infections - hospitals are overrun with over 14,100 coronavirus patients and have reported a lack of oxygen to treat those with breathing problems.

Peru only began its immunisation programme on Tuesday, two days after receiving

300,000 vaccine doses from state-owned Chinese company Sinopharm.

But the *Peru 21* newspaper reported on Thursday that former President Vizcarra had been vaccinated in secret in October, just weeks before he was impeached and removed from office on charges that he was 'morally incompetent'.

Vizcarra has insisted he had merely volunteered to take part in a vaccine trial for the Sinopharm jab.

"I made the brave decision to join the 12,000 volunteers," the former president, who is currently campaigning to win a seat in congress in April's general election, said. Vizcarra (57) said he kept the fact a secret because 'volunteers have to maintain confidentiality'.

AFP

Rouhani warns of 'fourth wave'

Tehran, Iran - Iran's President Hassan Rouhani warned on Saturday of a COVID-19 'fourth wave' as cases rise in certain areas of the Middle Eastern country hardest hit by the pandemic.

"This is a warning for all of us," Rouhani said in televised remarks. He said some cities in the southwestern province of Khuzestan were now 'red' - the highest on Iran's colour-coded risk level - after weeks of low alert levels across the country.

"This means the beginning of moving towards the fourth wave. We all have to be vigilant to prevent this," Rouhani added.

The country of more than 80mn people has lost close to 59,000 lives out of more than 1.5mn cases of COVID



Iran's President Hassan Rouhani (AFP)

infection. Iran has officially registered less than 7,000 daily infections since late December, but the number has crossed this level since early February.

Daily deaths have been below 100 as of early January, the lowest level since June.

AFP

to vaccinate one million people.

Russia registered Sputnik V in August, months ahead of Western competitors but before the start of large-scale clinical trials, which left some experts wary.

However, recent results published in *The Lancet* found that the vaccine is 91.6 per cent effective against COVID-19.

Some EU leaders seem to be warming to the idea of deploying Sputnik V as the bloc struggles with supply shortfalls for the three vaccines it has approved.

Plans to vaccinate all Americans

The European Medicines Agency has so far approved vaccines for the bloc developed by US-German firm Pfizer-BioNTech, US firm Moderna and British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca with Oxford University.

The EMA said on Friday it had started a 'rolling review' of a vaccine from German manufacturer CureVac, the first step towards possible authorisation.

In the United States - the world's hardest-hit country with more than 480,000 deaths - health authorities on Friday urged schools to reopen safely and as soon as possible, offering a detailed plan for limiting the spread of COVID-19.

The strategy emphasizes universal masking, handwashing, disinfection and contact tracing. While recommending vaccination for teachers and staff, it stops short of saying it is necessary - a divisive issue among teachers' unions.

The push comes as the United States is in the midst of an aggressive mass vaccination campaign, with a goal of inoculating nearly all Americans by the end of July.

Hard-hit Brazil's drive to vaccinate its population has stumbled this week as a lack of doses forced authorities to slow or halt immunisation in several key areas.

But Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Canada's COVID-19 vaccines rollout will be back on track in March with stepped up deliveries of doses to make up for recent delays.

AFP

India fears another flash flood from new Himalayan lake

Tapovan, India - A newly formed Himalayan lake raised fears on Friday of another flash flood above a disaster-hit valley in northern India, prompting authorities to conduct helicopter surveys and send a team on a 16-hour climb to investigate.

Thirty-eight people died and 166 are still missing, state disaster officials said, after a barrage of water and debris hurtled down the valley in the northern state of Uttarakhand with terrifying speed and force on Sunday, obliterating roads and bridges and smashing through dams.

The flash flood on the Rishiganga river is thought have been triggered by a chunk of glacier breaking off, or a glacial lake - formed when a glacier retreats - bursting its banks.

Glaciers are receding fast in the region due to global warming.

On Thursday, geologists said that a new lake had formed near the same river.



India's Border Roads Organisation workers rebuild the destroyed Raini bridge in Chamoli district in the northern state of Uttarakhand on Saturday (AFP)

Naresh Rana, a geologist at Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, released a video shot in the area, in which he pointed out the location of the lake and said 'this means that the Rishiganga will breach again'.

Satellite images and a helicopter survey had confirmed the presence of the lake, senior local police official Ashok Kumar said. He said that teams had been

sent to investigate on foot, a trek that would take around 16 hours, with the spot at around 4,200m above sea level.

"But there is one important thing to note. For the last few days, there was less water flow in the Rishiganga. But since yesterday, the flow is a lot," Kumar said. "That means that the lake has given some opening. It would have been dangerous if the water had just been collected and there was no flow."

A desperate and arduous search continued on Friday to reach around 30 people trapped in a tunnel since Sunday's flood, with hopes fading for their survival.

"We are trying to go to the smaller tunnel which is 12m below the existing one," Kumar said. "In the small tunnel, we are hoping for the best... If they escaped the slush and the water, they might be safe in one corner."

AFP

Firecracker factory blast in India kills 19

New Delhi, India - At least 19 people were killed and dozens hurt in a blast at a firecracker factory in India, authorities said on Saturday.

The blast on Friday afternoon in Virudhunagar district was one of the worst such incidents in years in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Local official R Kannan told AFP that the death toll was likely to go up in the next few hours.

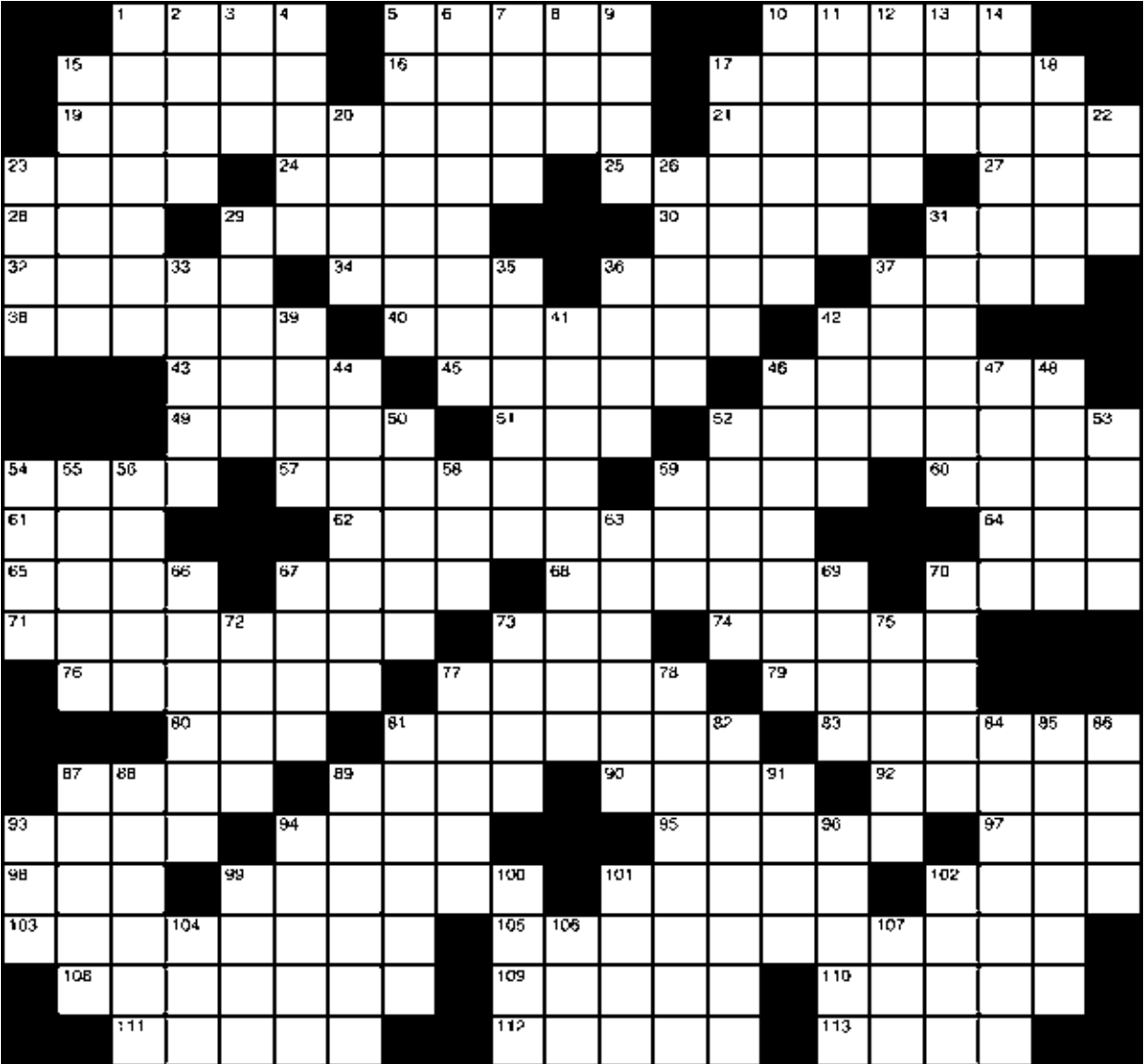
"So far 34 people have been injured and are undergoing treatment. Some of them are severely burnt," he said.

Kannan said there were around 74 people in the factory at the time of the incident.

According to media reports, the factory was being run illegally. News portal The Newsmint said the owner was missing and that the police were still investigating the cause of the accident.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Former Mets' stadium, now Citi
5 Kind of breath
10 Puppeteer Lewis
15 Case
16 Mites
17 Part of USA
19 "Z"
21 Cognomen
23 Location
24 Stable babies
25 Hunts
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28 Legal rep.
29 ___ Cats, band
30 Ginger ___
31 Disney's Daisy
32 Sea animal
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36 Pairs
37 Domino
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52 In a gentle manner

- 54 Lassie's offspring
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65 Sandwich staple fish
67 Whopper
68 "Streetcar" star
70 Sonny's ex
71 Belongs to Chelsea
73 Wahini's offering
74 What "mark twain" measured
76 Frivolity
77 Bambi and others when adult
79 Stagger
80 Proof of age
81 Indian dishes
83 Lie low
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108 Sahara and Gobi
109 Minor diet
110 Hundred Years' War battle
111 Clamor
112 Creator of R.P. McMurphy
113 Quiet!
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2 Now's companion
3 BPOE member
4 Up
5 Flea markets
6 Attendants
7 Sailors
8 Goof
9 Vaya con ___
10 Grins
11 Mild expletives
12 Boats
13 Movie dog's first name?

- 14 Early aviator
15 "... the village ___..."
17 Computer term
18 Frenzied
20 Tribunals
22 "___, a mouse!"
23 Adages
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31 Nattily dressed
33 Deceitful ones
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36 Cacophonies
37 Ring or Indigo
39 Nary a one
41 Cuddly toy
42 A Redgrave
44 Crime of lying
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48 Actress
Glenn ___
50 Keens
52 Inclination
53 Belgian river
54 Aisle
55 Customary
56 Lightweight velvet
58 Texas univ.
59 Grandpa in Ulm
63 Genesis

- 66 Jeanne Phillips output
67 ___ go
69 Oil cartel
70 Daphnis' love
72 Caps
73 PO sight
75 "___ of Endearment"
77 Shoe material
78 Marine scene
81 Editorial marks
82 Like potatoes
84 Open
85 Ritzy
86 A ___ and a holler
87 ___ to the teeth
88 "Once ___..."
89 Man or steak
91 Of the ear
93 Baby food
94 Uncouth ones
96 Era
99 Three in Bonn
100 Submerge
101 Spade and Goldwyn
102 Dollar bills
104 That: Sp.
106 Deli choice
107 East of Arg.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's time to come out of the shell you've been hiding out in! The moon bursts into your sign this morning, amplifying your energy and desire to be seen, heard, and validated on an emotional level. Big visions and plans for your newfound goals are trickling into your thoughts under Sunday's skies, as messenger Mercury merges with optimistic Jupiter. Grab a hold and don't let go!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Clarity is on the horizon of Sunday's skies. The moon marches into excitable Aries, helping you break out of routine and the emotional rut you've been inhabiting in recent days. Mercury merges with Jupiter, potentially bringing positive opportunities to the relationship front. It's an ideal day for contract signing or entering into any other jointly committed unions.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Sagittarians are well known for bringing laughs and good times to those lucky enough to be around them. Today, you need that favour returned! The moon marches into Aries, placing your focus solely on fun and leisure. You're likely to be especially chatty and communication-focused, as Mercury merges with your ruling planet, Jupiter—bringing in a barrage of new ideas.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Mixed feelings permeate Sunday's skies. On one hand, important plans are beginning to take form on the career front, as Mercury conjoins Jupiter. On the other, the moon meanders into Aries, putting you in a deeply reflective mood, one that requires time spent away from everything. Try to strike a balance between these separate parts of yourself that both need acknowledging.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You need a victory. The universe has got you taken care of today. Your ruling planet, Mercury spends the day cuddled up alongside Jupiter- a pairing that promises good news and positive vibes concerning your work circumstances and health concerns. Moods may be touchy though, as the moon treks into feisty Aries, heating things up on the relationship front.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Home is where the heart is. The moon cruises into Aries this morning, pushing your focus on the foundations beneath your feet. Time spent with family or engaging with projects on the home front will make you feel at ease. Elsewhere, news-bringing Mercury merges with ambitious Jupiter, bringing in uplifting news concerning your talents and job circumstances.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's hard not to feel good under Sunday's skies. Your ruling planet, quick-footed Mercury, spends the day alongside optimistic Jupiter. When these two merge, it's as if all the little details and facts you've been gathering finally fit into the big picture puzzle of your life. Embrace the uplifting energy you're feeling and take note of any big ideas or plans beginning to emerge.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Partnership matters seem to dominate the day ahead. The moon treks into your opposite sign of Aries, pointing your attention to the current state of affairs in the romance department. Positive news may be breaking through regarding your creative life or partnership concerns today, as Mercury merges with Jupiter, imbuing the day with a welcome sense of optimism.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Embrace the optimism you feel emerging under Sunday's skies. Mercury spends the day trading ideas with dream-big Jupiter in your sign. This mood-boosting union enhances the charisma of your self-expression while also bringing important news to your closest relationships. The moon bounces into excitable Aries too, keeping spirits high and your need for movement strong.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Two different stories are active under Sunday's cosmic landscape. The moon abandons Pisces and bursts into Aries, revving your engines for productive action on the career front. Elsewhere, Mercury spends the day whispering new ideas into aspirational Jupiter's ear. These two bring big news and optimistic feelings towards any partnership problems that need patching up.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's time to regain a sense of equilibrium. Sunday's skies help you re-align yourself on all levels- as the moon treks into Aries. You need exercise, good eating, and a diligent workflow to feel your best today—so, don't let yourself stay in couch potato mode! Elsewhere, good news and a positive outlook seeps in around your family and home front, as Mercury merges with Jupiter.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's time to kick it into high gear. You know what needs to be done on your to-do list and have everything you need to do it. The moon slides into Aries, firing you up and keeping you energized. Elsewhere, your ruling planet, jolly Jupiter, receives a visit from messenger Mercury. This union brings important news concerning close relationships and family matters.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The 'pulse' of the aquatic environment can be ascertained by measuring

- a. nitrogen
- b. oxygen
- c. alkalinity
- d. conductivity

2. The range of R.B.C to W.B.C in the human body is

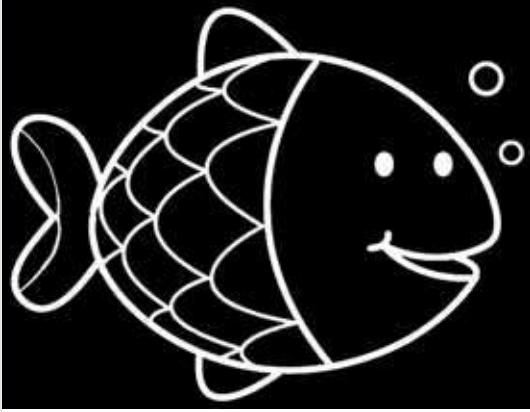
- a. 15 : 500
- b. 10 : 500
- c. 5 : 500
- d. 1 : 500

3. The official language of the Government of India is

- a. English
- b. Malayalam
- c. Hindi
- d. Marathi

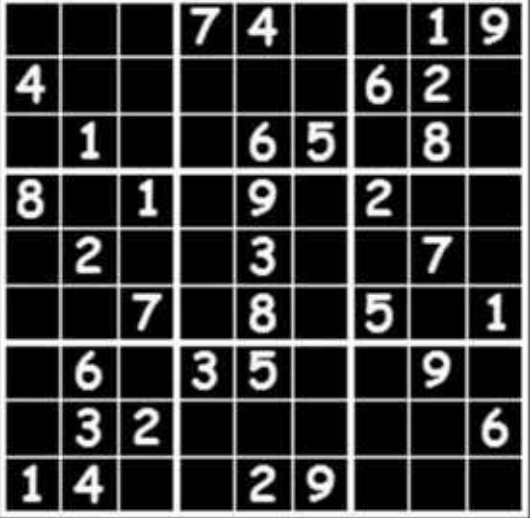
Answers: 1: b 2: d 3: c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number



BOGGLER



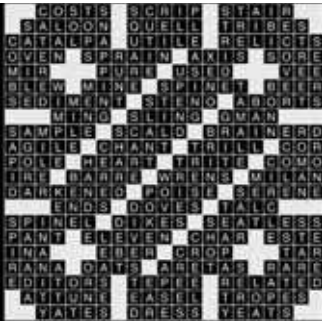
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (FEBRUARY 10)



WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count



Valentine's Day

MUTUAL RESPECT NURTURES LOVE

Valentine's Day 2021, for the first time in history, will be celebrated with great caution this year, in view of the pandemic and health concerns regarding outdoor celebrations.

While some people will, indeed, be heading outdoor for special dinners (though hotels and restaurants aren't quite announcing their celebrations in a big way) many others say celebrating the day at home is the safest option. But celebrations apart, most people uphold the fact that mutual respect is the only sure way to nurture love in a marital relationship for many years.

According to Tamsen Firestone, a life coach at psychealive.org which provides psychological advice for everyday life, there are three principles that keep love alive:

Participate in the act of love
Much of the advice that suggests taking ac-

tion to foster romance is effective because it encourages the act of loving rather than the state of being in love. The act of loving is gratifying for both, the lover and the loved one, and should involve behaviours that keep a close relationship alive and vital. These include offering emotional and physical affection, expressing tenderness, compassion, and sensitivity to your partner's needs, sharing activities and interests, and maintaining honest exchanges of personal thoughts and feelings. They also involve actively accepting, acknowledging, and appreciating love that is directed toward you.

Maintain individuality
It may seem like a romantic notion to regard your loved one as your soulmate, your better half. However, this kind of imagined fusion destroys romance. It is impossible to feel romantic without the awareness that you and your partner are each a distinct and unique individual. That is why you need to regard your-

self as a whole person and be sure you're not looking for someone to complete your incompleteness or to define or affirm you. Therefore, to maintain romance, it's critical that each partner maintains a strong sense of independence and strengthens each others' unique traits.

Ignore your critical inner voice
To varying degrees, we all have an enemy within, a part of ourselves that operates inside our heads much like a coach, criticising us and offering advice. This enemy is your critical inner voice and it is helpful to be aware of how your critical inner voice can try to sabotage your loving exchanges with your partner. When you experience the urge to be critical, no matter what your critical inner voice says, just ignore it and continue to be loving and affectionate. Soon it will become weaker and wither away while love will triumph.

Voices from the heart



Love flourishes with respect and support
I think, respect and support are the most important aspects that keep love alive for many years in a marriage. Yes, I am really blessed with a lovely family and wonderful people around me. I wish everyone a Happy Valentine's Day!
Tahira Fida



Five pillars of a relationship
It has been officially four years since my divorce. Yet, regardless of my journey, I believe, the key to keeping the spark in any relationship, be it marriage or otherwise, is communication, determination, patience, respect and love. These are the five fundamental pillars for any relationship to flourish, to grow, to spark, and to continue. On this beautiful day dedicated to love, I wish everyone a Happy Valentine's, filled with love.
Dr Laila Harub



Mutual respect, space, nurtures love
Mutual respect, giving each other space to do the things you like (for example, men love fishing and sports, and women love shopping) is what helps to keep love alive for many years. Plus, each partner needs a lot of patience as both may not always be on the same level.
Going out and having fun together - in our case, we go fishing and golfing together - is very important.
Erina Boughton



Love for nature abounds with us
It's about finding the middle ground where we invest in activities that we can all enjoy together. The three of us - Maha, Noah (my son) and myself - have this mutual love for nature. Now, with the coronavirus around, it has been very challenging as we can't travel and can do only limited exploring within Oman. However, we don't allow it to stop us from doing our usual outdoor activities. This is what keeps love alive among all three of us.
Abdullah al Jailani

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Sales Executive with 8 years exp in Oman, looking for suitable job. I have Oman D/L & car. Indian, male NOC available. Contact 94261611

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in Accounting, 15+ years of Experience in Oman, UAE & India as Finance / Accounts Manager / Chief Accountant. Looking for a Job and have NOC on visit. Contact: 79007124 / 78039524. Email: kadercok@outlook.com
Looking for a driver Job in Muscat, has got 9 years experience. Contact 78944897

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



VANDANA ANOOP
February 14

Happy Birthday.
May God bless you!
Stay safe always.
From Anya, Neel and Anoop

BIRTHDAY WISHES



MUHAIMIN HASSAN
February 14

Happy birthday
Muhaimin Hassan.
May Allah SWT bless
you with long,
healthy, wealthy life!
From: All your family
members

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

Artists create portraits of themselves in the 'month of love'

Hubert Vaz

Rangrez, the Indian artists group guided by the Indian Social Club, have began 2021 with quite a bang. After spending the year 2020 in isolation and cut away from all artistic ventures, the artists are now having quite a field day every month with virtual exhibitions that bring out new sides of their talents.

Opening during the 'month of love' (in view of Valentine's Day - February 14), Rangrez presents a unique celebration of love wherein the artists showcase themselves in varied interesting strokes on canvas.

While January saw the group present 'All Creatures Great and Small', dedicated to the animal world, for February, Rangrez presents 'Mirror, Mirror on the Wall', a collection of self portraits to celebrate 'self love' which, according to self help gurus, is said to be the 'greatest love of all'. This second virtual exhibition of the the group opens on February 27.

Founder and key organiser, Sushmita Gupta who has been entrusting the task of curating different group exhibitions to different artists from the group every month, says, "I invited Shalini Verma to curate this event.

66

With every brushstroke we have infused ourselves with more love, grace and self acceptance

She is a terrific portrait artist, a very senior and well known artist amongst the Indian community. She went ahead and called it

'Mirror, Mirror on the Wall', which I think is the perfect name for this collection."

All the artwork for the presentation of this virtual exhibition is done by Soubam Priyananda, one of the core members of the group, while the behind-the-scenes coordination was carried out by Uma Gopinath - all under the supervision of Sushmita.

In the various artworks on display, the participating artists have chosen one style or the other to bring out what lies beneath. It is a display of how each of the artists views himself/herself, with a short note on each to help the viewer understand their choice.

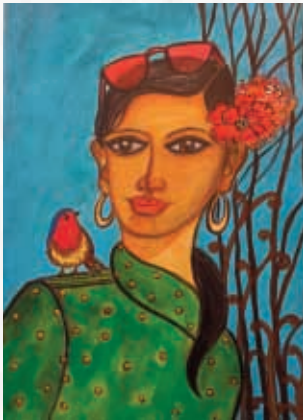
The self portraits collectively seek to convey that we live in an age of social media which makes it easy to lose sight of who we are and, more importantly, appreciate the fact that we are all unique and special.

The artists assert, that through art they have tried to dig deeper, come face-to-face with themselves, and express themselves on canvas. "It has been an exciting journey of self development, creation, and falling in love with ourselves, our shadows, and all. With every brushstroke, we have infused ourselves with more love, grace and self-acceptance," they chorus.



Shalini Varma

I am an artist driven by my passion to create through my art. I consider myself to be a genuine, thoughtful, and insightful person. I chose to portray myself in a realistic style because I do believe in capturing the realities of life and sticking to the basics. This painting has been a visual exploration, so while it captures my face and personality, it is also a demonstration of my style and skill.



Sushmita Gupta

My life is beautiful. It always is. And it is my decision to keep it so. For this self-portrait, I chose to go along with my modernist style which keeps a balance between a sense of reality and a head in the clouds. I view life through rose tinted glasses. In my eyes, I am beautiful. My robin, a songbird that is one of the earliest birds to herald a new day, is a constant in all my paintings, almost."



Uma Gopinath

I am a left-brained logical thinker who has ended up venturing into varied right-brained activities by chance. Art is one such maze, I am trying to find my way through. I am sometimes able to achieve what I intend to, but many times, I find myself lost. However, the quest to cross the maze and the challenge it poses, keeps me glued.

My painting is called 'L' éclat which means 'brilliance', which is the also meaning of 'Uma' in Sanskrit. Deviating from my usual kind of photo-realism, I have tried to experiment with contemporary pop art style of realism."



Sheffy Tattarath

I am an Indian painter. I have participated in around 39 exhibitions in Oman and 4 exhibitions in India as well. I have followed a photo realistic approach for this self-portrait, with acrylic medium on canvas. Being a realist painter, I try to portray a surrealist thought of a pausing moment between an artist and his creation as 'my scape' wherein one will be taught by the universe that is - observe the observer!



Reji Chandy

I am ambitious person in the art world. I thrive on challenge and constantly set goals for myself. I'm always looking for an opportunity to improve my painting ability. I have used a semi-realism style to portray myself. I try to bring out my colourful mind while I think about starting any painting.



Dheeraj Ghadicherla

I go by the name Distractor and I love working with coffee. My experiments with coffee never really stop. The earthiness that coffee brings to paintings has been a revelation - it's variety of tones and depth of colour, never cease to fascinate me. My goal is to use my research background to create a space in which human behaviour can be made tangible. Coffee, as a substance, is so intrinsically tied together with human beings, I utilise it here to form a concrete connection, showing how coffee bridges us with the world and each other.



Shashi Hemant

As a passionate artist, I believe in the power of colours brought by every stroke. I aim to connect creativity and realism harmoniously in my art, a journey filled with inner satisfaction. Blissful indulgence of enjoying the present portrayed in tranquillity is the aspect I have brought out in my self-portrait painting.



Rashmi Dauria

As an artist, I get inspiration from this colourful world, nature, people and their way of life. I have not taken any training, as such, but have passion and a magnificent obsession to create paintings. In this black and white portrait of myself, painted on canvas using acrylic colours in water colour style, I have used a single coat of acrylic colour mixed with water to get a transparency.



Tarini Agarwal

I am a late bloomer as an artist. I have reinvented myself after 24 years of teaching. Art is my passion from childhood and I have pursued it throughout my life. I have fulfilled my dream of living a life as a creative person. I have used a combination of styles to bring out the meaning and the character of my self-portrait. This is an expressionist piece, as I have used bold unrealistic colours because I chose not to depict it realistically.

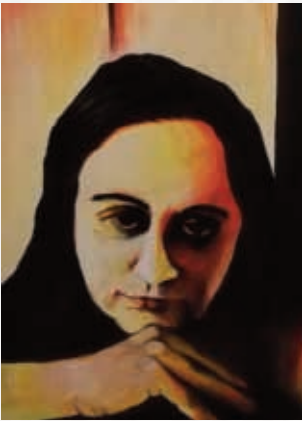
I was also trying to capture the feeling of who I am. My life as a teacher has now faded away, as I don the artist's cap and paintbrush. Art gives me wings and it envelopes me.



Anupam Arora

I am an artist on a journey of self-discovery through every piece of artwork that I create. I'm a kind, caring person who always gives her best in every situation. Creating this piece was both challenging and rewarding as it forced me to introspect on how I wanted to represent myself.

I chose to create an abstract portrayal of myself - a vibrant and vivid piece using multiple colours, patterns and mediums. You will see that not every inch of the painting is perfect - there are incomplete brushstrokes, hidden layers, and paint marks which are a representation of my own imperfections.



Ashwini Kelkar

Drawing and painting has been close to my heart since school days. I have learned techniques of painting through short term classes. Though comfortable with oil, I love to experiment in other mediums, too, especially water colours. I have portrayed my picture with a combination of both, realistic and digital art. The portrait brings out my zest for life and passion for creativity, in warm and bold colours, which also give depth to my inner self. Being a constant thinker, my position in the picture suits the portrait.



Sudha Siju

I love the world of colours. The vibrance in it makes me happy and the world around me beautiful. As an artist, I try to express and communicate through different colours, mediums and art styles. My painting portrays the way we should look beyond what we see. We should realise the inner beauty of living beings rather than judging them by their image defined by cultural and social standards. Love the real, imperfect, unique, and beautiful person that you are, in and out.



Soni Budhia

I am an artist by profession, toastmaster by passion, and by default a homemaker. I draw inspiration from little things that happen in my day-to-day life, nature, architecture, and people. I also draw inspiration from inspirational quotes and from the works of masters, but follow my own instincts.

In this painting I have used two colours to create the artwork. I wanted to show myself switching into two other roles I play, besides being a homemaker. So, you see me wearing a blazer and attending meetings as a toastmaster, and always ready to paint as an artist, with brushes in my hand.



Prakashan Puthur

I am a contemporary artist and my art speaks about life around me. Early in life, I knew my calling and so I graduated in the field of art from Kerala School of Art, in Thalassery. For my self portrait, I did a quick rough sketch which depicts the modern pace of life, where I am trying to encode my own signature in painting."



India's opener Rohit Sharma plays a shot during his knock of 161 on the first day of the second Test against England in Chennai on Saturday

ROHIT'S CLASSY 161 GIVES INDIA EDGE

INDIA VS ENGLAND

SECOND TEST: DAY ONE

Chennai, India - A majestic innings in capricious conditions from India opener Rohit Sharma gave the hosts a strong platform at the outset of the second Chennai Test on Saturday.

Rohit counterattacked during a harum-scarum morning session and then settled in to grind England into the dry, cracked clay of the MA Chidambaram Stadium, converting his fourth Test hundred as an opener into a dominant 161.

After Virat Kohli had voiced his dissatisfaction with the pitch produced at Chepauk for the first Test against England, it was no surprise to see the ball turn and spit for the spinners on day one of the rematch. Kohli himself was done in by it, bowled for a fifth-ball duck by the returning Moeen Ali before lunch. But that was the high point of the day for Moeen and England, as Rohit and Ajinkya Rahane (67) produced a bustling century partnership that threatened to be decisive even at such an early stage.

England claimed three early wickets - including one for Olly Stone with his third ball on only his second Test appearance - but were effectively shut out by Rohit

and Rahane during the afternoon session, despite regular half-chances coming and going.

Again Joe Root was left to rue a lack of control from his spinners: Jack Leach was the more consistent, asking questions throughout the day, while Moeen went at more than four an over, despite picking up the wickets of Kohli and Rahane.

Rohit rode his luck at times, gloving Leach short of slip on 41 and enduring some nervy moments against Moeen in the 90s, but he picked when to attack with judicious care to ensure that India would not squander their in advantage after winning the toss. He skipped along briskly during the early exchanges, scoring 80 from 78 balls before lunch, and kept England toiling long into the day. Such was his dominance that he was visibly frustrated after slog-sweeping Leach to deep backward square leg, having scored almost exactly two-thirds of his side's 248 for four.

Rahane showed his quality, too, reaching fifty for the first time since his Boxing Day Test hundred at the MCG. He fell shortly after Rohit, although not before he had controversially been given not out on review when the third umpire failed to

check whether a delivery from Leach had bounced up to hit the glove off the pad.

In the next over, Rahane was bowled sweeping at Moeen, and Root himself picked up a wicket when he had R Ashwin stabbing a bat-pad catch to short leg, but with Rishabh Pant bringing out his trusty frying pan to deal with the spitting ball India bounced along to reach 300 in the final over of the day, much to the satisfaction of the home fans who had been allowed back in for this match.

England, whose attack featured three changes from the one that bowled them to victory in the first Test, made a good start after being put into the field, with Stone striking in the second over, Shubman Gill pinned lbw offering no shot. Rohit and Cheteshwar Pujara then played positively during an 85-run partnership at more than four an over, with the former latching on whenever England's bowlers missed their lengths. Rohit hooked Ben Stokes for six, twice swept Leach for fours to bring up a 47-ball fifty and drilled another boundary to long-on to take India to 100 shortly before the break.

It was Leach who broke the second-wicket stand when Pu-

jara tamely steered to slip. That brought cheers from the crowd, with Chepauk back at 50% capacity for this game, as Kohli walked out to bat - but they were silenced a few moments later when Moeen tossed up an inviting delivery that ragged back inside the India captain's expansive drive to ping the off bail.

Kohli was left looking quizzically at his partner, and lingered while the umpires confirmed that the ball had indeed crashed directly into the stumps. But as has often been the case during Moeen's Test career, he mixed the sublime with the ordinary: his first ball of the day was a full toss, and a similar delivery saw Rahane get off the mark with a drive through cover.

With Rohit sweeping aggressively - he scored six boundaries and 31 runs from the 16 times he employed the shot - and Rahane working the gaps interspersed with the occasional off-side boundary, India held England at bay before pressing home their advantage as the day wore on.

Having moved to 97 by rifling Moeen over long-off for six, Rohit almost toe-ended a paddle sweep to short midwicket, before bringing up his hundred with a more effective attempt a

couple of overs later. England thought he should have been given out stumped on 159, but TV umpire Anil Chaudhary gave Rohit the benefit of the doubt despite his back foot seeming to be on the line when Foakes dislodged the bails.

Chaudhary was again the focus of attention once Rohit had departed, when he declined to wind the replay on after determining that the delivery had missed Rahane's inside edge. England's review, which had been lost in error, was later restored by the match referee - but their frustration was palpable at the end of a day that clearly distilled the challenge ahead.

Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD		
INDIA 1ST INNINGS		
Rohit Sharma	c Moeen b Leach	161
S Gill	lbw b Stone	0
C Pujara	c Stokes b Leach	21
V Kohli	b Moeen	0
A Rahane	b Moeen	67
R Pant	not out	33
R Ashwin	c Pope b Root	13
Axar Patel	not out	5
TOTAL: 300 for six in 88 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-85, 3-86, 4-248, 5-249, 6-284		
Bowling: S Broad 11-2-37-0, O Stone 15-5-42-1, J Leach 26-2-78-2, B Stokes 2-0-16-0, Moeen Ali 26-3-112-2, J Root 8-2-15-1		



West Indies' Rahkeem Cornwall celebrates his five-wicket haul on Saturday

Spinners keep Bangladesh in contest against West Indies

BANGLADESH VS WEST INDIES

SECOND TEST: DAY THREE

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's spinners took late wickets to give them a glimmer of hope after Rahkeem Cornwall's maiden five-wicket haul gave the West Indies a healthy 113-run first innings lead in the second Test in Dhaka on Saturday. The visitors finished the third day with 41 for three in the second innings, stretching their lead to 154 runs.

Nkrumah Bonner was on eight along with nightwatchman Jomel Warrican, two not out, as the West Indies looked to set a target for the hosts on the fourth day. The West Indies owed their advantage to Cornwall, who finished with five for 74 helping as Bangladesh were bowled out for 296 an hour into the final session on the day.

But Bangladesh's spinners struck back almost immediately as Nayeem Hasan dismissed Kraigg Brathwaite for six and Mehidy Hasan removed Shayne Moseley for seven. Taijul Islam delivered further blow blowing out John Campbell for 18.

Liton Das, Mehidy and Mushfiquur Rahim earlier hit fifties to rescue the Bangladesh innings in reply to the West Indies' 409 runs in the first innings.

Cornwall dismissed Liton for 71 to break his 126-run seventh wicket stand with Mehidy after the pair helped Bangladesh recover from 155 for five.

Resuming on 105 for four, Bangladesh - who must win the game to avoid a series defeat - earlier pinned great hopes on Mushfiquur, their most experienced batsman.

But he threw away his wicket by attempting a reverse sweep

off Cornwall after completing his fifty off 89 balls.

Senior Bangladeshi cricketers Abdur Razzak and Shahriar Nafees formally retired during the lunch break, ending their career to join the country's cricket administration.

Left-arm spinner Razzak, who played 13 Tests and 153 one-day internationals and 34 Twenty20 internationals, was recently named as a member of the selection committee.

Shahriar, who played 24 Tests, 75 ODIs and a T20Is, will join the Bangladesh Cricket Board as assistant manager for cricket operations.

The West Indies won the first Test in the two-match series by three wickets.

AFP

SCOREBOARD		
West Indies 1st Innings 409		
BANGLADESH 1ST INNINGS		
T Iqbal	c Moseley b Joseph	44
S Sarkar	c Mayers b Gabriel	0
N Hossain	c Bonner b Gabriel	4
M Haque	c Da Silva b Cornwall	21
M Rahim	c Mayers b Cornwall	54
M Mithun	c Brathwaite b Cornwall	15
L Das	c Blackwood b Cornwall	71
M Hasan	c Brathwaite b Gabriel	57
N Hasan	c Blackwood b Cornwall	0
T Islam	not out	13
A Jayed	c Bonner b Joseph	1
Extras:	(b 5, nb 10, w 1)	16
TOTAL: 296 in 96.5 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-11, 3-69, 4-71, 5-142, 6-155, 7-281, 8-281, 9-283, 10-296		
Bowling: S Gabriel 21-3-70-3, R Cornwall 32-8-74-5, A Joseph 17.5-3-60-2, K Mayers 8-2-15-0, J Warrican 13-2-48-0, N Bonner 3-0-17-0, K Brathwaite 2-0-7-0		
WEST INDIES 2ND INNINGS		
K Brathwaite	c Das b Nayeem Hasan	6
J Campbell	b Islam	18
S Moseley	c Mithun b Mehidy Hasan	7
N Bonner	not out	8
J Warrican	not out	2
TOTAL: 41 for three in 21 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-11, 2-20, 3-39		
Bowling: T Islam 7-2-13-1, Nayeem Hasan 10-3-14-1, Mehidy Hasan 4-0-14-1		

Goud's five-for as Muscat drub AER

LOCAL CRICKET

Sandeep Goud picked five for 29 to guide Muscat CT to an massive nine-wicket win against AER in an Oman Cricket Premier Division (50-over-a-side) match at Al Amerat on Friday.

AER, who suffered their ninth consecutive defeat in the season, were bowled out for paltry 80 in 20 overs as Muscat speedsters, Goud and Ganesh Chandrashekhkar (three for 25), ripped through the rival batting line-up. AER's Asim Kamal top-scored with 30.

Muscat, who are leading the division, raced to the target in only 7.4 overs, scoring 81 for one with Shoaib Khan hammering an unbeaten 45 off 23 balls and Kashyapkumar Prajapati making 27 off 14.



Sandeep Goud

(Shoaib 45 n.o., Prajapati 27).

A Division (50-over-a-side): SARCO 261 in 49.2 overs (Dileepa Srihal 72, Murad Khan 66, Sameer Mohammed 46; Munthir al Balushi 5-46) beat OCT Muscat 105 in 22.3 overs (Rashad Mohammed 49, Majid Hussein 32; Sandip Patel 5-34, Jeethesha Shridhara 2-31).

B Division (30-over-a-side): Orient Travels/Gitacs 268-7 (Gurvur Singh 92, Arif Hussain 63; Abdul Ghani 2-54, Nadhir Ghulam 2-53) beat OCT Al Hail-A 94 in 22.1 overs (Abdul Ghani 37, Faris Said 28; Arif Hussain 3-22, Umar Rahman 3-23, Ihsan Khan 2-26).

B Division: OCT Ruwi 214-6 (Zubair Ali 58, Shuaib Ismail 52; Younis Murad 2-38) beat OCT Seeb 152-9 (Salim al Balushi 31, Younis Murad 30; Shuaib Ismail 3-15, Mohammed Ali 3-35, Imran al Balushi 2-24).

BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division: AER 80 in 20 overs (Kamal 30; Goud 5-29, Chandrashekhkar 3-25) lost to Muscat CT 81-1 in 7.4 overs

Pretorius helps South Africa level series

PAKISTAN VS SOUTH AFRICA SECOND T20I

Lahore, Pakistan - Fast bowler Dwaine Pretorius recorded the best figures for South Africa in the shortest format to help his team beat Pakistan by six wickets in the second Twenty20I in Lahore on Saturday.

The 31 year old grabbed five for 17 to keep Pakistan down to 144 for seven in 20 overs before Pite van Biljon (42) and Reeza Hendricks (42) took South Africa past the modest target in 16.2 overs.

It was a canny performance by Pretorius who marginally improved on the previous best figures by a South African, five for 19 by medium pacer Ryan McLaren against the West Indies at North Sound in 2010.

Mohammad Rizwan top-scored for Pakistan with a 41-ball 51 laced with six boundaries and a six while Faheem Ashraf hit two boundaries and as many sixes in his 12-ball unbeaten 30.



South Africa's Dwaine Pretorius (left) celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Mohammad Nawaz on Saturday

Jon Smuts in the following over, finishing with two for 18.

But Hendricks and Biljon punished some erratic bowling during their 77-run third wicket stand before both fell in successive overs.

Hendricks, who hit three sixes and as many boundaries in his 30-ball knock, was finally caught off leg-spinner Usman Qadir in the 12th over. Biljon hit two sixes

and three boundaries off 32 balls before he returned a gently leading edge back to left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz.

David Miller (25 not out) and skipper Heinrich Klaasen (17 not out) added 40 in an unbroken fifth wicket stand to see their team across the line.

Pakistan were once again lifted by Rizwan who followed his 89 against New Zealand in

December and 104 not out in the first match with another superb knock. After losing the toss, Pakistan skipper Babar Azam opened the batting but was soon on his way back to the pavilion as Pretorius trapped him leg before in the second over.

At 48 for six, the home side were struggling but Rizwan, who became only the fourth Pakistani batsmen to score three

SCOREBOARD		
PAKISTAN		
M Rizwan	c Phehlukwayo	
	b Pretorius	51 (41)
B Azam	lbw b Pretorius	5 (4)
H Ali	c Sipamla	
	b Phehlukwayo	10 (11)
H Talat	c van Biljon b Shamsi	3 (7)
I Ahmed	c Miller b Pretorius	20 (21)
K Shah	c Klaasen b Pretorius	15 (18)
F Ashraf	not out	30 (12)
M Nawaz	b Pretorius	0 (2)
U Qadir	not out	4 (4)
Extras:	(lb 3, w 3)	6
TOTAL 144 for seven in 20 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-20, 3-48, 4-93, 5-97, 6-126, 7-126		
Bowling: JJ Smuts 4-0-20-0, D Pretorius 4-0-17-5, G Stuurman 2-0-28-0, L Sipamla 3-0-29-0, A Phehlukwayo 3-0-31-1, T Shamsi 4-0-16-1		
SOUTH AFRICA		
J Malan	b S Afridi	4 (2)
R Hendricks	c Ahmed b Qadir	42 (30)
JJ Smuts	c Azam b Afridi	7 (8)
P van Biljon	c & b Nawaz	42 (32)
D Miller	not out	25 (19)
H Klaasen	not out	17 (9)
Extras:	(nb 2, w 6)	8
TOTAL: 145 for four in 16.2 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-21, 3-98, 4-105		
Bowling: S Afridi 3-1-18-2, H Rauf 2-0-26-0, M Nawaz 4-0-27-1, F Ashraf 2-0-17-0, U Qadir 4-0-43-1, I Ahmed 1.2-0-14-0		

consecutive T20I fifties, added 45 for the fourth wicket with Iftikhar Ahmed who made 20.

AFP

NADAL PASSES TOUGH TEST



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action during his match against Britain's Cameron Norrie in Melbourne on Saturday. World No 2 Nadal won 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 and next faces Fabio Fognini of Italy

Melbourne, Australia - World No 2 Rafael Nadal accelerated his pursuit of a record 21st Grand Slam title on Saturday with a testing victory over Cameron Norrie in an Australian Open battle of the left-handers.

The Spanish second seed has altered his service motion due to lower-back tightness, but it didn't stop him emphatically demolishing his first two opponents in straight sets.

Britain's 69th-ranked Norrie proved a tougher assignment, with Nadal pressed much harder before emerging a 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 winner in an empty Rod Laver Arena as Melbourne went into a five-day coronavirus lockdown.

Earlier, world No 1 Ashleigh Barty gave long-suffering Melbourne something to cheer as the home hope swept into the last-16 at an empty Margaret

Court Arena following a snap coronavirus lockdown on Saturday.

Barty said it was 'very strange' to play behind closed doors, a day after more than 22,000 fans visited Melbourne Park, as the five-day, state-wide lockdown went into force.

Barty's straightforward 6-2, 6-4 win over Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova put her into the fourth round without dropping a set as she bids to become the first Australian winner since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

"It's very strange, it changes the sound in the court a little bit," Barty said of the empty, 7,500-seat stadium.

"Maybe a little bit rude of me, but I quite liked the sound. Man, I love the crowd but I love the sound the ball makes. It kind of felt a little bit like practice."

Six million people in Victoria state, including Melbourne, returned to lockdown after an outbreak of the highly contagious UK strain at an airport hotel. Australia's second-biggest city

only emerged from a four-month shutdown in October and has since stayed virtually virus-free.

'Good feelings'

Nadal's win put him into a Slam last-16 for the 49th time, behind only Roger Federer (67) and Novak Djokovic (53).

"All the matches are tough... I didn't convert the opportunities I had at the beginning of every set, so then the situation becomes a little bit more difficult," he said.

"And then of course you are playing against the best players in the world, so it's normal that

you might suffer a bit. But happy now, good feelings. Of course I need to keep improving."

Nadal, who next faces fiery Italian Fabio Fognini, who beat Australian Alex de Minaur in straight sets, is bidding to win his 21st major title and claim sole ownership of the men's record, which he currently shares with Federer.

His victory keeps him on course to meet Djokovic in the final, although the defending champion is under an injury cloud after suffering what he called an abdominal 'muscle tear' in his third-round clash on Friday.

It remains unclear whether the top-seeded Serb will be able to play his fourth-round match against Milos Raonic on Sunday.

The odds were heavily

stacked in Nadal's favour against Norrie, who has never lost an Australian Open match to a player ranked as low as the Briton at 69.

He also holds a stellar record against fellow lefties, winning 103 of 117, with the last loss coming against Denis Shapovalov in Montreal in 2017.

Nadal signalled his intent by opening with a serve to love, but Norrie proved a tough nut to crack, going blow-for-blow in a baseline battle and breaking the second seed.

But Nadal quickly refocused to fight back and take the set 7-5 when Norrie sent a forehand long. The Spaniard created plenty of break point opportunities and finally converted an overhead to go break for 4-2 in the second set.

Another break sealed the set



Ashleigh Barty of Australia in action during her third-round win on Saturday

as Norrie, who was aiming to reach a Grand Slam last 16 for the first time, wilted under Nadal's relentless firepower. Little separated them in the third set until Nadal made his move in the 11th game, forcing a match point with a screaming forehand and booking the win when Norrie send a backhand wide.

Bizarre scenes

The latest curbs triggered bizarre scenes late on Friday as Djokovic's injury-hit win over Taylor Fritz was suspended at 11:30 pm local time to remove fans before the midnight lockdown.

As play unfolded in Melbourne Park's empty arenas on Saturday, former world No 1 Karolina Pliskova had a racket-smashing tantrum en route to a 7-5, 7-5 defeat by fellow Czech Karolina Muchova.

Ukrainian fifth seed Elina Svitolina beat Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 6-0, and Russia's men's fourth seed Daniil Medvedev overcame buttock pain and a mid-match lapse in his 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-0 win over Filip Krajinovic of Serbia.

"It's a different atmosphere, different vibe," said Greece's world No 6 Stefanos Tsitsipas, after his 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 win over Mikael Ymer. "But if I can win my next matches, the crowd will be back. It's just five days, and I'll be happy to see them back."

Tsitsipas beat Ymer in a silent John Cain Arena - which was packed with thousands of noisy fans late on Friday for Australian

player Nick Kyrgios' defeat by Dominic Thiem.

In the same venue, Matteo Berrettini beat Russian seed Karen Khachanov 7-6 (7-1), 7-6 (7-5), 7-6 (7-5) to set up a meeting with Tsitsipas.

"I really miss the crowd, I have to be honest," said the Italian ninth seed.

"Looking at a stadium like this and seeing it empty is not the best feeling. But we're living in really tough times."

Elsewhere Russia's Andrey Rublev ended Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez's record 75th consecutive Grand Slam to set up a meeting with Norway's Casper Ruud.

AFP

OTHER SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS (x denotes seeding)

MEN'S SINGLES

THIRD ROUND:

Andrey Rublev (x7) beat Feliciano Lopez 7-5, 6-2, 6-3; Casper Ruud (x24) beat Radu Albot 6-1, 5-7, 6-4, 6-4; Mackenzie McDonald beat Lloyd Harris 7-6 (9-7), 6-1, 6-4; Fabio Fognini (x16) beat Alex De Minaur (x21) 6-4, 6-3, 6-4.

WOMEN'S SINGLES

THIRD ROUND:

Shelby Rogers beat Anett Kontaveit (x21) 6-4, 6-3; Elise Mertens (x18) beat Belinda Bencic (x11) 6-2, 6-1; Donna Vekic (x28) beat Kaia Kanepi 5-7, 7-6 (7-2), 6-4; Jennifer Brady (x22) beat Kaia Juhan 6-1, 6-3; Jessica Pegula beat Kristina Mladenovic 6-2, 6-1.

Like father, like son: Casper reaches Grand Slam last-16



Casper Ruud (right) with his father Christian Ruud

Melbourne, Australia - Casper Ruud became only the second Norwegian to make the last-16 of a Grand Slam on Saturday, emulating his father Christian who made the grade at the Australian Open in 1997.

The 22 year old outlasted Radu Albot 6-1, 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 to book a fourth-round Melbourne Park clash with Russian Andrey Rublev and said he was proud to match his dad's achievement. "He was happy. He's my main coach, so it's also an achievement for him. Now he has done it himself and as a coach," he said.

"So I think he's happy that I've been able to not beat his

record yet, but at least do the same as he did.

"That was kind of the last inch he had on me when it comes to Norwegian records in tennis," he added.

Ruud senior, who reached a career-high ranking of 39, to his son's current 28, crashed in the last 16 in 1997 to Goran Ivanisevic, who is also in Melbourne as coach of world No 1 Novak Djokovic. "It's one of his best results but toughest losses of his career he's told me, so I've heard that story a couple times," said Casper. "But I hope that won't be the case for me on Monday."

AFP

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Seeb upset; Dhofar unbeaten

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

OMANTEL LEAGUE

Defending champions Seeb suffered their first league defeat in 16 months when they went down 0-1 to unfancied Bahla in the 2020-21 Omantel League match at the Nizwa Sports Complex on Thursday night.

Holders Seeb hadn't lost a match in the domestic league since September 21, 2019, when Fanja had recorded a 2-1 win in the second round of the previous season. However, Bahla, who recently appointed former Nizwa coach Abdulaziz al Riyami as their new manager, shocked their rivals for the club's third successive win.

Ahead of the ninth round, only champions Seeb and 11-time winners Dhofar had not lost a match in the ongoing season.

Seeb's defeat comes after 32 games in the Omantel League spanning two seasons.

Bahla's decisive goal was scored by Robert Sanga just before the interval and the hosts then held on to the narrow lead.

Seeb's Portuguese coach Bruno Miguel Pereira may have had the upcoming second-leg His Majesty's quarterfinal game against Saham on Monday in his mind while fielding his starting XI against Bahla.

Seeb leads Saham 1-0 after the first-leg HM's Cup quarterfinal that was played on February 5 at the Seeb Sports Complex and will travel to Sohar for the return-leg with a narrow lead.

There was no such trouble for Dhofar, who emerged a comfortable 2-0 winner against Saham at the Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah, also on Thursday, to keep their unbeaten record intact.

Dhofar, coached by Rasheed



Action from the ninth-round Omantel League match between Dhofar and Saham at the Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah on Thursday



Al Suwaiq and Oman players vie for a ball during their match on Friday

Jaber, have now closed down the lead with Seeb to just three points as they have now garnered 19 points to Seeb's 22.

It may be recalled that Dhofar have been docked six points ahead of the season along with Al Nahda and Saham by the Oman Football Association.

For Dhofar, it was back to winning ways after their draw in the previous round as they tamed Saham with goals from Ali al Busaidi and Khalid al Hajri.

After the match, Dhofar coach Jaber said, "What was important was to collect the three points. We will now focus on our return-leg HM's Cup match against Al Mussanah on Monday." Dhofar lead 2-0 after the first-leg quarterfinal against Mussanah.

Mussanah, meanwhile, continued to impress in the on-

going league as they edged past Sohar 1-0 at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex to stay third in the Omantel League standings with 17 points.

Elsewhere on Friday, Al Rustaq trounced Al Nahda 3-1 at the Buraimi Sports Complex while Al Ittihad drew with Nizwa 1-1 at the Nizwa Sports Complex.

In the other matches, former champions Al Suwaiq hammered Oman 4-1 at the Seeb Sports Stadium and Al Nasr edged past Muscat by a solitary goal at the Al Saada Sports Complex.

For Suwaiq it was a much-needed morale boost as they bounced back after two successive defeats in the league. The win put them at fourth place with 16 points, a point more than Al Nasr.

Suwaiq recently signed a deal

with former Iraqi coach Hakeem Shaker. The experienced manager has previously coached Suwaiq and led them to HM's Cup and league glory. He is likely to take charge from next round following the completion of his quarantine protocol.

Rustaq are at sixth spot and are followed by Bahla, Oman and Ittihad.

Sohar is placed tenth with seven points while Nizwa, Al Nahda, Muscat and Saham complete the bottom four.

Standings (after nine rounds):
1 Seeb (22 points), 2 Dhofar (19, -6), 3 Al Mussanah (17), 4 Al Suwaiq (16), 5 Al Nasr (15), 6 Al Rustaq (14), 7 Bahla (14), 8 Oman (10), 9 Al Ittihad (9), 10 Sohar (7), 11 Nizwa (6), 12 Al Nahda (3, -6), 13 Muscat (3), 14 Saham (0, -6).

@ashokmuscat



Action from the match between Seeb and Bahla at the Nizwa Sports Complex on Thursday

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Late Leicester blitz rocks Liverpool

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Leicester, UK - Leicester deepened the crisis engulfing Liverpool as three late goals took the Foxes into second in the English Premier League with a 3-1 win at the King Power and allowed Manchester City the chance to pull further clear of the defending champions on Saturday.

Jürgen Klopp's men have now lost three consecutive games and could find themselves down in sixth by the time Chelsea and West Ham play winnable home games on Monday night. The Reds looked to have responded to a 4-1 thrashing handed out by City in their last outing with an impressive performance until a collapse in the final 12 minutes.

Two blunders from Alisson Becker gifted City goals last weekend and the Brazilian was at fault again, while new signing Ozan Kabak had a difficult debut at centre-back.

Liverpool's superiority for the first three quarters of the game was rewarded by a brilliant team goal as Roberto Firmino's flick was curled home by Mohamed Salah 23 minutes from time.

But unlike the relentless winning machine that picked up 196 points in the past two seasons, Liverpool's confidence is now brittle and they self-imploded after Leicester's fortunate equaliser from James Maddison's free-kick.

The visitors felt Daniel Amartey should have been ruled offside for obstructing Alisson's view, but a VAR review deemed



Liverpool's goalie Alisson Becker (right) fails to save Leicester's James Maddison's opening goal on Saturday (AFP)

the Ghanaian to be onside. Alisson should have done better in any case to deal with Maddison's shot and less than two minutes later he handed Leicester a second.

A long ball over the top should have been comfortably dealt with, but the onrushing goalkeeper got in Kabak's way and the defender's rushed clearance allowed Vardy to run the ball into an empty net.

"The two goals we conceded obviously had a massive impact and for human beings that's normal, but for us we don't accept that," said Klopp. "We have to react differently."

Four minutes later, Kabak's lack of pace was exposed as Harvey Barnes raced clear to make it 3-1. Liverpool are now clinging onto a place in the top-four as they lead Chelsea and West Ham by just a point, who both

have a game in hand.

A first victory for Brendan Rodgers over his former club since being sacked by Liverpool in 2015 means Leicester move six points clear of the Reds as they edge closer to a Champions League return. "It was a real collective team performance," said Rodgers. "You can see the improvement in the team's mindset. Our reaction was superb."

At the other end, Burnley pulled further clear of the bottom three with a dominant 3-0 win at Crystal Palace.

SPANISH LEAGUE
Atletico back to winning ways
Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid swerved a second consecutive slip in La Liga on Saturday by squeezing past Granada 2-1 to move eight points clear at the top of the table.

After drawing at home to Celta Vigo on Monday, Diego Simeone's side got back on track with a narrow victory at Los Carmenes, secured by Angel Correa's fortuitous winner in the second half. There was a hint of luck in Granada's equaliser too, Yangel Herrera's shot deflecting off Marcos Llorente, who had himself put Atletico in front only three minutes earlier.

Barca, who are third and 11 points behind the leaders, face Alaves at home later on Saturday before Real Madrid host Valencia on Sunday.

OTHER RESULTS:
Saturday: Sevilla 1 Huesca 0;
Friday: Celta Vigo 3 Elche 1.

FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP
Bayern claim 'six pack' of titles
Al Rayyan, Qatar - Bayern

Munich won the Club World Cup final in Qatar on Thursday as Benjamin Pavard's second-half winner sealed a 1-0 victory over Mexico's Tigres, the Germans claiming a 'six pack' of titles within 12 months.

Pavard's close-range tap-in was enough to give European champions Bayern their sixth title in quick succession.

Bayern are the second side to win all six available titles within a year after Barcelona managed the feat in 2009.

Hansi Flick's men had already won the Champions League, Bundesliga, German Cup, UEFA Super Cup and German Super Cup last season.

"It feels good to have the six pack - six titles in a row is something very special for us," said Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski, who helped set up Pavard's goal.

OTHER RESULTS
ITALIAN LEAGUE:
Saturday: Torino 0 Genoa 0;
Friday: Bologna 1 Benevento 1.

GERMAN LEAGUE:
Saturday: Borussia Dortmund 2 Hoffenheim 2, Bayer Leverkusen 2 Mainz 2, Werder Bremen 0 Freiburg 0, VfB Stuttgart 1 Hertha Berlin 1;
Friday: RB Leipzig 2 Augsburg 1.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP:
Saturday: Aberdeen 0 St Mirren 0; Dundee United 3 Livingston 0; Rangers 1 Kilmarnock 0; Motherwell 1 Hamilton 4.

AFP

Oman Racing to begin first round on P10

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Ahmad Al Harthy will line-up on the fifth row of the GT class grid for his maiden race in the Asian Le Mans Series at Dubai Autodrome on Saturday after an expectedly hard-fought qualifying session on Friday.

Ahmad will be joined by his Jonny Adam and Tom Canning in their Aston Martin Vantage GT3 car for the four-hour race.

In the qualifying, Aston Martin factory driver Adam took qualifying duties this morning, in the session which delivered the grids for both rounds one and two.

Lapping with the tenth fastest time of 1m56.603seconds to secure a top-ten starting slot in the GT class for round one, the Scottish driver delivered a second quickest

lap of 1m56.835 seconds for the race two grid.

Speaking after the qualifying, Ahmad said, "It's a very tight and tough grid. Qualifying, to be honest, was how we expected it would be and we know we have a much more competitive race car - that's what we've been working extremely hard on during the build-up to the weekend.

"I shall be starting both races this weekend and we're looking forward to a clean start, clean race and gaining positions.

"I'm sure we can climb through and make up some good places. The standards are very high, as we expected from the Asian Le Mans Series, and I think we have a really good car but we'll see how it works out for us. We're positive, though, we should be very competitive."



Jonny Adam of Oman Racing Team in action during the qualifying session of the opening round of Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai